

CHAPTER 17

LATE POLYTHEISM

CHAPTER 17A

THE WORLD-VIEW¹

GARTH FOWDEN

‘Paganism’ was first invented towards the end of its existence, during the period covered by this volume. Previously there had been ‘religion’, or ‘piety’, evoked by the many gods of many peoples. The monotheistic religions – Judaism, and its recent offspring Christianity – were aberrations. But as Christianity’s fortunes improved, it felt the need to define, as diminishingly as possible, ‘the other’. Hence – in the Latin-speaking world and, with any frequency, only from the mid-fourth century onward – ‘paganism’, from *paganus*, meaning originally either a rustic or a civilian (non-soldier), in other words ‘not one of ours’. In the Greek-speaking world, adherents of the old religion came in the fourth century to be referred to as ‘Hellenes’, a different sort of limitation, but still a limitation, which had however the virtue of drawing attention to Greek culture’s role as a common frame of reference for the various local polytheisms of the eastern Mediterranean. The convenience of ‘paganism’, in particular, was that, as a single cultural hypostasis, undifferentiated either spatially or chronologically, it could *in*

¹ This was submitted in 1988 and its bibliography has been revised to 1999. The main historical sources are Cassius Dio, Herodian and the *Historia Augusta* (available in the Loeb Classical Library); Aur. Vict. *Caes.* (Budé, ed. Dufraigne, Paris 1975); and Zosimus (Budé, ed. Paschoud, Paris 1971–2000). The vast literature on the *Historia Augusta* does not dispense the reader from deciding for himself, more or less subjectively, what is likely to be true, and what fabricated to serve the obscure purposes of the late fourth-century author(s). But progress in the study of late polytheism is coming more from archaeology, epigraphy and papyrology than from re-evaluation of literary sources: see the studies of particular cults and regions published in *EPRO* and *ANRW*, esp. 11.16–18. For the coins, see *RIC* and *BMC*; Kent (1978). Among modern surveys that take a thematic approach to the description of Roman polytheism, Nilsson (1974) is by far the sanest and most comprehensive. MacMullen (1987) is strenuously idiosyncratic, though its notes are a mine of references. Liebeschuetz’s survey of the more prominent individual cults in *CAH XI*² is here taken as read. It has been found easiest to write an *histoire événementielle* of late polytheism from the time when it begins to interact continuously and documentably with Christianity – roughly from the Diocletianic persecution onwards. Geffcken’s dated *Last Days of Greco-Roman Paganism* (1978) provides a preliminary sketch within such a chronological framework, concentrating on the third to fifth centuries. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, has shown to what extent that sketch can now be filled out, at least down to the 320s, and has in particular used the mass of newly discovered inscriptions and papyri to attempt a somewhat more chronologically differentiated view of third-century polytheism than was previously available.

toto be credited with whatever infamy had at any time in the past attached to alleged cultic abuses, however isolated. Because of the pejorative connotations of 'paganism', and in order to underline that the cult of the many gods, whether in the ancient Mediterranean world or anywhere else, does not have to be seen through Christian eyes, we shall speak of 'polytheism'. Admittedly, 'polytheism' too is a clumsy and implicitly monotheist category, since it attaches a single label to a range of religions whose most obvious common denominator is apparent only from a monotheist perspective; but it is a less nakedly offensive formulation than 'paganism'.

By using the term 'polytheist' we also underline how the henotheist and even monotheist tendencies observable within this ancient religious tradition,² and which have so impressed some scholars as to impel them to assert that 'paganism' and polytheism cannot be equated, were additives, a superstructure that demoted but never denied the many gods. Any deity with a sufficiently large and vocal clientele, however circumscribed socially or topographically, could make a claim to sovereignty and omnipotence. But he or she did so by assimilating other gods, who might likewise be regarded as sovereign in other milieux. On the Aventine at Rome Jupiter Dolichenus, a Syrian god favoured mostly by soldiers, took under his syncretist wing Isis, Serapis, Mithras and other divinities.³ There is no fundamental divergence between this point of view and that of Plotinus when he writes that:

one should praise the intelligible gods and then, above all, the great king of that other world, most especially by displaying his greatness in the multitude of the gods. It is not contracting the divine into one but showing it in that multiplicity in which God himself has shown it, which is proper to those who know the power (*dynamis*) of God, in as much as, abiding who he is, he makes many [gods], all depending upon himself and existing through him and from him.

(11.9[33].9.32–9, tr. Armstrong)

Even the most exalted philosophical minds remained polytheist; there was no such thing as 'pagan monotheism'.⁴

Unlike Christianity or Islam, polytheism was not a religion whose beginning could be located at a single point in time. Rather, it accumulated out of people's experience of life and nature. If ever there was a religion comprehensible only in terms of *la plus longue durée*, this was it. Hence the difficulty of communicating a sense of movement or process to a description

² Nilsson (1974) 569–78; Habicht (1969) 12–14; Mitchell, *Anatolia* 11.43–51; Liebeschuetz (2000) (CAH XI²).

³ Le Glay (1987) esp. 554–6. Note Le Glay's reflections on the diverse phenomena and diachronic mutations disguised by categories such as 'syncretism' and 'Oriental cults', umbrella concepts no less ubiquitous or dangerous than 'paganism'/'polytheism'. See also Le Glay (1991), and Alföldy (1989) 75–8.

⁴ Beard, North and Price (1998) 1.286 assert that some adepts of Isis or Mithras 'were, in the very strictest sense, monotheists', but offer no evidence. At 1.307 they painstakingly document the proposition that 'an individual could support (*sic*) more than one cult'.

of polytheism during one particular period – in the present instance, of only a century and a half. Hence, too, polytheism's lack of dogmatic framework; for dogma implies major revelation, and revelations such as form religions are events which, theoretically at least, can be fixed in time. Polytheism was, in short, a very diverse religion – so diverse, indeed, that it is tendentious to regard it as a single religion at all.

Within its many separate ethnic traditions, polytheism also embraced widely differing mentalities. These variations of belief cannot be fitted neatly into the two-tier analysis – rational and irrational, popular and élite – that is sometimes offered. The two-tier analysis is crude, not because in late antiquity everybody had become 'irrational' and 'superstitious', but because, in any age, individuals are a mixture of experiences, not always consciously absorbed, let alone formulated. If this first of three chapters on late polytheism sets about describing the polytheist world-view from the educated end of the social spectrum, that is thanks mainly to the possibility of generalization offered by the synthesizing or at least systematizing patterns of thought found in some representatives of the educated class. It is not intended to suggest that the educated were representative, or that the chapter title's allusion to a polytheist 'world-view', in the singular, is other than a flag of convenience. But it does also happen to be the case that, at the eleventh hour, some polytheist intellectuals were anyway trying to make sense of the extraordinarily incoherent tradition they had inherited. They could not avoid considering polytheism in all its aspects, from mysticism to magic, even if they so disliked what they saw that they were at times driven to their own version of the two-tier analysis.⁵

I. PROBLEMS AROUND PLOTINUS

The only late polytheist thinker considered worthy of serious study by historians of philosophy was, until recently, Plotinus. Although influenced 'more by the theologians' Plato than the philosophers' (in the modern sense of those terms), and despite the fact that ultimate reality was for him beyond thought, Plotinus' view that the sage must tread the overwhelmingly greater part of the road to the divine by his own unaided effort, without invoking supernatural assistance, ensured a hearing from modern students of the classical intellectual tradition. This tradition, in a mixed form dominated by Platonism but drawing also (not without friction) on the teachings of the Peripatos and Stoa, had continued to be cultivated in the philosophical schools of the Antonine and Severan periods, though for the most part in an

⁵ Iambl. *Myst.* v.5, 15 (τῆς θρησκείας ὁ διπλοῦς τρόπος); Fowden (1993c) 34. For a general introduction to philosophy and philosophers from Plotinus to Iamblichus, see Wallis (1972) 1–137. Philosophy's concerns were by definition religious; but the present chapter touches on doctrine only in relation to the broader polytheist world-view.

uninspiring scholastic spirit. When, in the year 232, the Egyptian provincial Plotinus arrived at Alexandria to study philosophy,⁶ he was depressed by the sterile atmosphere of the schools. It was some time before he heard about Ammonius Saccas. But Ammonius made a deep impression on Plotinus, for he was an 'enthusiast', 'divinely possessed with longing for the true goal of philosophy', determined not to waste time picking over differences between Plato and Aristotle, but to reconcile them and the other major philosophers 'into one and the same spirit' (Hierocl. *Prov.* ap. Phot. *Bibl.* 251.461a). This was indeed the only alternative to the academic bickering Lucian had satirized in the previous century. And even by the standards of an age that esteemed the individual teacher immensely more than the written tradition, Ammonius was revered by his pupils, some of whom refused to disclose, during his lifetime, what he had taught them. If, as his own pupil Porphyry (234–c. 301–5) asserted, Plotinus adhered closely to this inherited doctrine when he started teaching on his own account, then clearly Ammonius was no ordinary scholar, but an accomplished spiritual guide.

After Ammonius died, Plotinus moved to Rome (244). For some ten years, his teaching remained as strictly oral as his teacher's; but from 253 until his death in 270 he produced a body of writing which Porphyry later edited as fifty-four treatises arranged into six *Enneads*. These texts are not a formal statement of a doctrinal system, but records of Plotinus' discourse as he sat amidst his pupils. In the *Enneads* we can hear him expounding Plato and Aristotle, commenting on the commentators, answering questions. If he criticizes Aristotle, he does so constructively, without departing from the spirit of Ammonius' teaching. He always speaks densely, in an inspired tone, and never loses sight of the sage's central concern, the bringing back of 'the god in us' to 'the God who is over all things' (Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 2, 23). Though our individual soul has fallen away from universal Soul and become enmeshed in matter, it may aspire to purification and escape; and the route of that escape, the philosophical life exemplified by Plotinus, must combine an ascetic but not abusive regime, the 'taking away' of all superfluous concerns (Plot. v.3[49].17), with pursuit of virtue, application to study and unflagging concentration on the divine core of our being. In this way, with the help of divine grace,⁷ we may attain, as Plotinus did on four occasions while Porphyry was with him, to the experience of total, self-forgetting absorption into the transcendent One, the Good. Falling away from this state, the philosopher will regret bitterly his return to the human world; but his duty is to give others too, through his teaching, the possibility

⁶ For Porphyry's valuable *Life*, we now have the edition and monumental commentary by Brisson *et al.* (1982–92).

⁷ Plot. vi.7[38].22.

of following him. That he and he alone can do; and it is a task of such sensitivity, even danger, that it can be accomplished only in the deeply personal day-to-day interaction of teacher and pupil. Neither metaphysical system-making nor literary composition, but the experience of the teacher in person, lies at the heart of late Platonism.

Since Plotinus' attitude to conventional religion was misunderstood no less by his contemporaries than by modern scholars, it must be emphasized that he was recognized to be a focus of holiness, a 'holy man'. Plotinus' place in the history of religion is no less central than his place in the history of philosophy, because the distinction was for him inessential. And in general the late polytheist holy man combines, unselfconsciously, these two attributes of holiness and learning, which Christianity has often separated or even placed in antithesis.⁸ The holy man was more characteristic of late polytheism than of any other period since the pre-Socratics, not, as some suppose, because of anxieties brought on by the 'third-century crisis', but thanks to a reaction – always present, but now intensifying – against the rationalist current within the Greek philosophical tradition. By the second century people were tiring more easily of the same old arguments and were turning either to alternatives that had been there all the time, like Pythagoreanism, or to other philosophies and religions whose doctrines were presented by divine or mythical beings, such as Zoroaster or Hermes Trismegistus, or by men who 'taught with authority, unlike their own scribes'. It was this crucial need to establish his master's authority beyond doubt, but also to prove there was still life in the classical tradition, that prompted Porphyry to preface the *Enneads* with a biographical introduction, which drew attention to Plotinus' careful exposition of his predecessor's works, but culminated in a spectacular Apolline oracle on the master's soul. A century later the Sardian rhetor Eunapius filled his *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists* from Plotinus onward with the wonders they had worked, with almost no allusion to matters of doctrine. The ascetic, pious philosophical life had become a focus of aspiration for many educated people, and its individual exemplars were the means by which their followers encountered the divine.

The figure of Pythagoras, in particular, was central to this venture.⁹ The Pythagorean ideal was widely popular in Plotinus' lifetime, as witness Philostratus' biography of the first-century thaumaturge Apollonius of Tyana, commissioned by the empress Julia Domna. And the works of recent Pythagoreans influenced Plotinus so much that he was accused of plagiarizing one of them, Numenius.¹⁰ The Pythagoras known to late antiquity had been an inspired and authoritative teacher, whose philosophy was a revelation of divine truth. He had placed great emphasis on the role of

⁸ Fowden (1982). ⁹ Dillon (1977) 341–83; O'Meara (1989); Kingsley (1995).

¹⁰ Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 14, 17, 20.

mathematical studies in accustoming the aspiring philosopher to confidence in the existence of the immaterial. And he had taught the general principle of the 'friendship' (*philia*) of different doctrines, Greek and barbarian, towards each other, so that his own philosophy was a 'compound' which drew on the teachings of the Egyptians, the Chaldaeans and the magi as well as on Orphism and the Greek mystery cults (Iamb. *Vit. Pyth.* 151, 229). Ammonius Saccas' enthusiasm for reconciling the various school-traditions 'into one and the same spirit' was authentically Pythagorean – surely he must have been the intermediary between Numenius and Plotinus. Pythagoras had underlined also the sage's duty to reverence the gods and to lead a life of piety and asceticism. In general, Pythagorism was understood less as a doctrine than as a way of life. Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras* was implicitly universalized in Iamblichus' *Pythagorean Life*; and much later, Marinus gave his *Life of Proclus* the subtitle *On Happiness*.

No less than their model, the Pythagorean holy men of late antiquity were hard for even their disciples to understand, and stirred serious tensions in their immediate environment. Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* is shot through with criticisms of and by competitors, and the mutual jealousies of imitators. Particular ambiguity surrounded the sage's relationship with conventional religion. In their writings and those of their followers we often read that the man who has 'sanctified his own soul through his thoughts' has no need of temples, statues and altars (Julian, *Or.* ix.199B; and cf. Lucian, *Demon.* 11). When one of Plotinus' followers, Amelius, once invited his teacher to accompany him to the temples, Plotinus refused, on the grounds that 'they [the gods] ought to come to me, not I to them' (Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 10). Porphyry remarks that Amelius 'had become a lover of sacrifices', so apparently he had not always been: Plotinus was reacting, intemperately perhaps, to what he saw as excess in a favoured pupil. He himself warns elsewhere against the arrogance of setting ourselves without good reason above the gods (Plot. II.9[33].9). The context of such assertions is always, though, that of controversy. That 'all things without exception are connected with each other' by a hierarchy of divine powers at work in both the intelligible and the visible worlds, including the statues of the gods (Plot. II.3[52].14; cf. III.4[15].6, IV.3[27].11), was common ground in these milieux; but where, on this register, was one to place the holy man? Hence Porphyry's story about how Plotinus had submitted to the magical invocation of his guardian spirit by an Egyptian priest, who had been forced to admit that this guardian was a god, and no mere subordinate spirit as in the case of ordinary people. More generally, the question of how to envisage, locate and handle the working of divine power (*dynamis*) in the world was endemic in late polytheism. The answers ranged from the contemplative philosopher's austere optimism to the common astrologer's grinding determinism.

Knowledge of even elementary religious doctrine is rare in all societies. The force of tradition and habit was considerable in late polytheism too. Making all due allowances, though, it can still be said that the polytheist understanding of divinity, of what it meant to be a 'god', had become heavily impregnated with a somewhat impersonal notion of 'power'.¹¹ The advent of philosophy, and later the spread of cultic syncretism, had produced an alternative, though not a replacement,¹² for Homer's gods with their known personalities and their predilection for anthropomorphic disguise. At Rome, gods had always been more like powers than personifications. And this idea was in wide circulation by later antiquity: gods had come to be conceived also as impersonal 'powers' or 'energies' that radiated from the sun, the planets and the stars, and might be envisaged as daemons. These forces constituted a universal network of 'sympathy', or what the Pythagoreans called 'friendship', which bound together the divine and material realms, penetrated humans, animals, plants and even minerals, and linked them through sympathetic 'chains' to particular planets or gods. Hence the direct control exercised over all creation, according to some, by the heavenly bodies, and the obsession of late polytheists with the doctrine of fate and the often purely mechanistic conceptions of the astrologers. Hence too the belief of magicians that formulae correctly pronounced and accompanied by appropriate actions, if directed towards materials low in the sympathetic 'chain', might influence the divine powers to whom those chains were linked. And all these powers had to be learnt and (if possible) controlled, not just by the magician, but by every pious person, so that appropriate honour might be done them, and the retribution consequent on neglect or offence avoided. It was anxieties such as these that lay behind the magician's cagily generalized addresses to the divine realm ('I call upon you, gods of heaven and gods of earth, gods aerial and gods terrestrial': *PGM* XII.67), and the endless queries to oracles about the identity of particular gods ('Who are you?': Lucian, *Alex.* 43), and what temples, statues, altars, sacrifices, prayers, priesthoods and so on were appropriate to them.

The ritual purity of the worshipper was likewise an important concern; and besides physical purity that might include being 'pure in mind' (*LSCG* no. 139, from Lindos) before and during actual worship. At least in certain places and contexts, public confession of sins was practised (see chapter 17*b*, p. 544). But it would be wrong to imagine that moral purity was widely regarded as a prerequisite for worship – that a known malefactor should be prevented from sacrificing was a thought that might occur to a philosopher more easily than to a priest.¹³ Still less did the average polytheist aspire to

¹¹ On 'power' in late polytheism see Nock (1972) 34–45; Nilsson (1974) 534–43; Fowden (1993*b*) 75–94.

¹² Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* 102–67.

¹³ Philostr. *Vit. Apoll.* I.10–11.

imitate the gods, as Christians aspired to imitate Christ. It was not just that the gods' individual identities were less clear-cut than had once been the case, and in danger among the educated of submergence in a colourless deism. The traditional myths were anyway marred by an immoral element that had never been intended for imitation. To most polytheists, 'religious experience' meant experience of and adjustment to the activity of the gods – of divine power – in the world of men. The measure of contact with the supernatural was not its own 'intensity', but the fruit it bore, in terms both of understanding (knowledge) and of achievement (power).¹⁴

In polytheism, then, the pursuit of virtue and the spiritual life (which goes beyond the religious emotion one perforce feels in the presence of the gods) were primarily the domain of the philosophers, who were not necessarily noted for their commitment to either traditional beliefs or public cult – in this, Plotinus was provocative but not untypical. Especially in the face of the challenge presented by Christianity, this separation of conventional religion from ethics and spirituality seemed increasingly unsatisfactory. The effect on the broad polytheist community of hearing the street-corner preaching of a wandering Cynic, or perhaps reading a florilegium of edifying philosophical quotations, was scarcely to be compared with the regular instruction received by the Christian community from its bishop during the weekly house-church liturgy.¹⁵ As we shall see, certain remedies for this situation were initiated in the philosophical milieu. Circumstances outside these narrow circles were in some ways favourable. Thanks to the influence of the philosophers, the tendency to syncretize related deities into single composites, and the habit of envisaging gods as impersonal powers, henotheist and even monotheist ideas were widespread. Although honouring 'all the gods (and goddesses)', as the Apolline oracles of Didyma and Claros commanded, was nothing new,¹⁶ the force of the formula was widely felt in this period: one ensured that one's prayer would be heard, while expressing also, more or less consciously, belief in the underlying oneness of divinity. Not that the old gods were lost sight of: with Asclepius, in particular, even the most intellectual could feel perfect intimacy (see chapter 17*b*, pp. 545–6). In fact, Asclepius was the henotheists' ideal – a powerful saviour, to honour whom was nonetheless fully compatible with the invocation of other gods as taste or need suggested. In short, there was no lack of potential common ground on which philosophers and ordinary polytheists might stand together. Henotheism in particular avoided one of the main drawbacks of monotheism, whether philosophical or otherwise, namely the apparent difficulty of communication, the urgent need for a mediator between Man and God. Perhaps it might, after all, be possible to

¹⁴ Hence the self-satisfied tone of the well-known rules (*LSCG* no. 51, c. A.D. 175) of the Athenian Iobacchi (cult-association of Dionysus), accused by Moretti (1986) 253 of deficient 'religiosità'.

¹⁵ On late polytheist ethics, see Dihle (1966) 666–88.

¹⁶ Burkert (1985) 170, 216–17, 272. Didyma: Parke (1985) 100. Claros: Granino Cecere (1986) 281–8.

escape from the caprice of the daemons and the realm of fate. Might one perhaps find a divinely revealed 'way', by which the soul could be purified, and freed from the bonds of matter?

II. HERMETISM AND THEURGY

This convergence of religion and philosophy provided fertile ground for the doctrine of theurgy, which taught the soul's purification from the pollution of matter and return to its source through a combination of rituals and sacred formulae. But this doctrine, adumbrated as far as the élite Platonist milieu was concerned by Porphyry and developed by Iamblichus, was not the eleventh-hour aberration that historians of philosophy have supposed, on the basis of a view of their subject confined to the writings of the second-century scholastic establishment, plus Plotinus. Perhaps precisely because he was not a professional philosopher, Philostratus could take for granted that philosophy's proper concerns embraced not only cosmology, medicine (including healing techniques we would call magical), astronomy and general natural and ethnological observation, but also divination, sacrifice and 'all sorts of lore both profane and mysterious' (Philostr. *Vit. Apoll.* III.34–50; cf. Amm. Marc. XXI.I.7–14). Fortunately we possess, in the shape of the *Hermetica*, an important body of texts whose variety and lack of polish suggest that they may be a slightly better guide to the general condition of the late polytheist mind than the so-called 'Middle Platonists', or their Aristotelian opponents. The writings of these men – such as Severus, Gaius, Atticus, Alexander of Aphrodisias – were constantly at hand in Plotinus' circle. Of the *Hermetica*, the Egyptian sage never breathed a word.

Since Hermes Trismegistus was really the learned Egyptian god Thoth, and the writings attributed to him not only a product of the fused Graeco-Egyptian culture of the Nile valley, but also by this time increasingly known outside Egypt too, Plotinus' silence is significant.¹⁷ Clearly these writings were not for the élite. What we call the *Corpus Hermeticum* is a body of philosophical works in Greek on God, the World, Man and the history of the soul. The lost *Perfect Discourse* survives in a Latin translation called the *Asclepius*; and the Nag Hammadi codices have recently added Coptic versions of parts of the same book, and of a previously unknown work, *The Ogdoad reveals the Ennead*. As well as these philosophical works, written between the first and third centuries A.D., there are also numerous texts on magic, astrology, alchemy and other branches of what scholars call 'pseudo-science', that were attributed to or associated with Hermes. These 'technical' treatises concerned areas of knowledge that were covered in the earlier stages of initiation into Hermetic wisdom; but Hermetic teaching was of course primarily oral, passed on by teachers to their disciples in the

¹⁷ The points made in this paragraph are documented in Fowden (1993b).

context of small circles very like those of Ammonius and Plotinus. This personal relationship of spiritual 'father' and 'son' increased in importance as the adept approached the more exalted doctrines about the nature of the divine realm. The texts which describe this progressive ethical purification and philosophical initiation emphasize its spiritual nature, an aspect of Hermetism which was to appeal to both Byzantine Christians and modern historians of philosophy; yet there are signs that this spiritual emphasis did not exclude the use of semi-liturgical prayer, hymns and even certain ritual actions, including sacrifice, in the earlier stages of spiritual ascent. As for the culminating vision of the One, it is accessible only with and through the master, usually represented in the treatises as Hermes himself. To Iamblichus we owe the information that, in a treatise now lost, Hermes described the ascent of the soul in explicitly theurgical terms. To his contemporary, the alchemist Zosimus of Panopolis, there seemed nothing incongruous in drawing on the philosophical Hermetica in order to explain the spiritual purification that could be attained through alchemical art.

The common ground between the Hermetica and the theurgists' sacred texts, the *Chaldaean Oracles*, lies not just in their Graeco-Oriental character, but also in their acceptance that humans may attain to the divine by many routes, in which cultic practices as well as philosophical intellection have a part. The *Chaldaean Oracles* were produced during the second century, and are now preserved only in fragments.¹⁸ They deal with theological matters such as the structure of the divine hierarchy, whose grades they (like the Gnostics) multiply in an attempt to scale the heights that separate humans from the transcendent Father. The *Oracles* reveal little about the practical application of theurgy in the philosophical life, but probably this was a later development.¹⁹ Porphyry reflected at length on their exhortation to 'seek out the channel of the soul, whence it descended in a certain order to serve the body, and how thou, joining action to sacred word, shalt lead her again upwards to her ordered place' (*Orac. Chald. fr.* 110). In his *Letter to Anebo*, Plotinus' pupil attacked theurgy on the grounds of its irreconcilability with the fundamentally intellectual character of Greek philosophy. Elsewhere (*Regr. fr.* 2 Bidez, 290 Smith) he conceded that it was a possible means of purifying the 'spiritual soul', but denied that it has any effect on the higher or 'intellectual soul', and hence that it is able to lead the soul 'to behold its God and to perceive the things that truly exist'. Indeed, Porphyry asserts that the intellectual soul is capable of attaining this vision of the unity that lies beyond plurality even without the prior operation of theurgy on the spiritual soul. Theurgy is, in other words, no more than a possible first step

¹⁸ See the edition with introduction and commentary by Majercik (1989).

¹⁹ For general discussions of theurgy see Wallis (1972) 105–10, 120–3; Shaw (1995); van Liefferinge (1999).

in the soul's return to its source, a partial, inadequate alternative to virtue and philosophy, because it involves a technique almost as independent of the moral qualities of its practitioner as are the spells of the vulgar magician.

Plotinus' awesome example on the one hand, and the powerful pull of religious cult on the other, confused Porphyry and no doubt contributed to the nervous crisis that caused his departure from Plotinus' circle.²⁰ By contrast Iamblichus (d. c. 320–5) was a self-confident, original and inspiring thinker, who through his teaching and writing (including a considerable body of commentary on Plato and Aristotle) provided his numerous followers with a sound philosophical education, but also pushed to their logical conclusion the theurgical speculations that had lately been surfacing in Platonist circles. Establishing himself in Syrian Apamea, which had been a centre of Pythagorean teaching since at least the time of Numenius (fl. c.150), Iamblichus set about formulating a fresh view of the philosophical life that would transcend the conflicting categories which had dominated Porphyry's thought.

Iamblichus' 'new song', as a critic called it (Them. Or. XXIII.295B), was a synthesis of 'Chaldaean', 'Egyptian' – that is Hermetic – and Greek philosophical doctrines; and it was expounded in direct answer to Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*, in a treatise which Renaissance scholarship entitled *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians*. The most notable respect in which the theurgist differed from the conventional philosopher was in his dependence on what Iamblichus calls:

the perfective operation of the ineffable acts correctly performed, acts which are beyond all understanding; and on the power of the unutterable symbols which are intelligible only to the gods.

(*Myst.* II.II.96–7)

The purpose of these acts and symbols was to invoke the power of the gods, in order to liberate the soul from the body and the bonds of sympathy, and bring about its 'theurgical union' with the divine. For Iamblichus, in other words, the theurgist's field of action, confined by Porphyry to the lower soul, had come to embrace the very highest levels of mystical union. The philosopher, for Plotinus an autonomous agent in the pursuit of perfection, his soul divine enough to attain union with the transcendent One almost by its own efforts (see p. 524), was transformed by Iamblichus into an operative dependent on the help of, and constantly in communion with, a glittering celestial hierarchy composed of gods, archangels, angels, daemons, *archontes*, heroes and souls – the divine ladder by which the theurgist sought to scale the heights of heaven.

²⁰ Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 10 (esp. ll. 36–8), 11.

In the vivid anecdotes that make up Eunapius' *Life* of the 'divine' Iamblichus, we see for the first time fully formed, in the historical record rather than the imagination of Pythagoras' or Apollonius' biographers, the figure of the late polytheist holy man, the representative of that 'holy race' of Platonist philosophers (Hierocl. *Prov. ap. Phot. Bibl.* 214.173a), whose successive generations spanned the last two centuries of hellenic religion and thought. Eunapius presents Iamblichus as a thaumaturge who soared aloft in the air and was transfigured with light as he prayed, enjoyed supernatural gifts of foresight, and conjured spirits from hot springs to satisfy his pupils' craving for miracles, thereby making visible the 'friendship' that linked him to the guardians of the material world. Philosophical discussion there undoubtedly was in his circle; but what struck the wider public was the Pythagorean *ipse dixit*, the conclusiveness of the 'oracles' that the holy man uttered, rather than the subtlety of his reasoning. Apollo himself was said to have delivered an oracle in which he contrasted Porphyry the 'polymath' with the 'divinely inspired' Iamblichus (David, *In Porph.* 4, p. 92.2–7).

Inevitably, their enemies accused the theurgists of being just magicians – after all, theurgy and magic manipulate the same network of universal sympathy by closely parallel techniques. But the theurgists' objective remains that of Plotinian philosophy – the purification and salvation of the soul; and indeed Iamblichus says much less about the part played by ritual acts in describing the culmination of the soul's ascent than when discussing the earlier stages. By ritualizing these initial stages, Iamblichus made them more accessible than the stern and lonely way of the contemplative philosopher. But mystical union remained, as it had been for Plotinus, an intuitive leap that only a few would dare to make, and an experience to the description of which the vocabulary of the philosopher was less inadequate than that of the theurgist. Though it seems likely that Iamblichus had wanted, by fusing elements of cult and philosophy, to make polytheism more coherent and better able to resist Christian attack, in practice theurgy remained the preoccupation of an élite.

Hermetism too can hardly have penetrated much beyond the milieu of those who read books. To do so, it would have had to become an organized religion, with all that that implies in terms of dilution of the central message. It was perhaps in part through its institution of seven formal grades of initiation, which seem to have allowed progressive access to teachings of personal, ethical and even mystical implication, that Mithraism managed to propagate itself successfully (chapter 17c, pp. 549–50). It offered its adepts, not just the one-off initiation characteristic of other mysteries, but a coherent Mithraic 'way', not unlike the 'way' of Hermes – a context, in short, for a whole life. Some such sense was needed of how to progress – προκόπτειν, *procedere*, *proficere*, *progredi*, verbs that diviners, doctors and

philosophers used, but not the ordinarily pious – if polytheism was to compete seriously with Christianity.²¹ Yet the overwhelming majority of Mithraists never embarked on the grades, and contented themselves with a simple initiation. As for the philosophers, Plotinus was indeed read and reflected on by a select few, including some educated Christians. Though certain of his doctrines were not uncontroversial, and his method and style lax by the standards of later, more scholastic generations, he did set the tone of the whole of the last phase of antique philosophical debate, ensuring its purificatory and contemplative orientation. His remained one of the best examples of how the philosophical life should be conducted. Theurgy lacked his blessing; but Iamblichus' successful integration of its doctrines into the framework of philosophy deeply influenced those who traced their intellectual descent from Plotinus. In the focusing, though, of many of the best minds on the contemplative life, and in their distaste for the social and even political involvement which their master, Plato, had sought and recommended, we may see one of the reasons why public polytheism seemed at the last to lack the will to adjust, to fight and to live.

III. MAGIC AND ASTROLOGY

Students of late polytheism now increasingly recognize that there is no more an absolute distinction between philosophy and magic than between religion and magic. Though the communication of philosophical doctrine presupposed a trained audience, whereas the results of the magician's or astrologer's activities might be purchased and 'consumed' without further ado, the educated did not automatically assume that magic and astrology were of no validity. There were dyed-in-the-wool rationalists, but there were also the followers of Iamblichus, even among the most rarefied intellectuals. Indeed, it is difficult to find theoretical statements about magic and astrology *except* among those who had the intellectual's length of perspective. Even the magical papyri,²² though they emanate from an essentially anonymous milieu, are often compendia, library editions that lack the wear and stains one would expect had they ever been used alongside the messy procedures they describe.

Not that we lack evidence for down-market magic. With the briefer papyrus spells, and the horoscopes preserved in the same medium,²³ we often reach a reassuring level of illiteracy; even more so with the magical gems and other types of amulet that protected the individual in daily life,²⁴

²¹ Cf. *Ep. Gal.* 1.14: προέκοπτον ἐν τῷ ἰουδαϊσμῷ; *Aug. Conf.* v.10.18: *desperans in ea falsa doctrina* [sc. Manichaeism] *me posse proficere*.

²² *PGM*, plus translation by Betz (1992). See also Daniel and Maltomini (1990–2).

²³ Neugebauer and van Hoesen (1959). ²⁴ Philipp (1986) 5–26.

or the curse tablets (*defixiones*) by which some sought to force others to act against their will – to fall in love, fail in some way, be stricken with sickness or die.²⁵ ‘Causing disease’ is indeed included in a list of the parts of magical knowledge to be found in one of the magical papyri (*PGM* I.328–31). The others are ‘the art of prophecy, divination with epic verses, the sending of dreams, obtaining revelations in dreams, interpretations of dreams’. It comes then as no surprise to discover that, at least in Egypt with its professional clergy, priests were highly regarded experts in magic. But for those who felt intimidated by the temple milieu, there were alternatives. Women – above all, old women who lived alone – were no less respected for their occult powers than in other ages and cultures. And every marketplace and local festival attracted its share of itinerant magicians, fortune-tellers and dream-interpreters, who were also given to calling door-to-door.²⁶ In life’s crises and anxieties they were often the first resort – for the adolescent whose erotic imagination had outstripped his pocket or his luck;²⁷ for the charioteer scheming to trip his rivals in the circus; for the philosopher or sophist who wanted to eliminate a competitor – even Plotinus was once assaulted in this way.²⁸

The many surviving magical texts used to be little regarded by historians, partly because they are not descriptions of actual consultations, but mere formulae, in need ideally of the anthropologist to flesh out their dry bones. Horoscopes, though, tied by their very nature to a specific time and place, are more accessible to the historian. There is one, preserved in a manuscript written in 1388, but originally given on 16 July 475 to an anxious merchant awaiting at Athens the arrival of a cargo of luxury fabrics, furniture and camels from Alexandria.²⁹ It is a late text, but unusually circumstantial, and anyway occult techniques changed little, being respected in proportion to their (alleged) antiquity. First the astrologer took his astrolabe and Tables, and drew up a chart of the heavens as they were at the moment of consultation. Then he listened to (or, as here, anticipated) his client’s enquiry, before consulting the standard authorities, whom he quoted verbatim in his written reply. In this particular case the astrologer described both the contents of the cargo and the problems of the voyage, and predicted when the boat would arrive safely at Piraeus.

This example illustrates well the functional aspect of astrology – occult wisdom as a technique which was expounded in books and valid whether or not the individual practitioner was competent. If the horoscope was wrong or the spell ineffective, one did not stop believing in astrology or magic. One looked for a better practitioner. ‘It is not the

²⁵ Gager (1992). ²⁶ *CTh* IX.16.1–2.

²⁷ *PGM* XVIIa (a particularly overheated text); Robert (1990) 497 n. 1 (a *defixio* to win four women for one man).

²⁸ Porphy. *Vit. Plot.* 10. ²⁹ Dagron and Rougé (1982).

science that is to be blamed, but the deceit and reckless ignorance of the man involved' (Firm. Mat. *Math.* 1.3.8; cf. Amm. Marc. XXI.1.12–14). As for the intellectual validity of occult techniques, that depended of course on acceptance of a sophisticated cosmology centred, as already noted, on the concept of universal sympathy; and practitioners who were sufficiently educated to understand the intellectual context of their trade might advance beyond its derivative and repetitive aspect to an awareness of connections with other areas of knowledge about the divine world.

Such an awareness is certainly implicit in the important collection of papyri discovered at Egyptian Thebes in the 1820s.³⁰ To this 'Thebes cache' belong several of our most important and compendious magical papyri, and the early alchemical papyri now at Leiden and Stockholm, all dated to the third century or the earlier half of the fourth, and sharing both a tendency towards bilingualism (Greek and demotic/Coptic), and various scribal affinities. The collection seems to have been designed for study rather than the practical use envisaged by the texts' original authors; but in the fourth century even the mere possession of such books could result in criminal charges, and it was perhaps out of some such fear that our unknown Theban occultist hid his collection away, and so bequeathed us an insight into the workings of an anonymous and provincial late polytheist mind.

The alchemical books in the Thebes cache represent the early, materialist stage in the art's development, when the emphasis was still on imitating the appearance and colour of precious substances. They show no sign of the shift effected by Zosimus of Panopolis, around the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth, towards the idea that, since the material and spiritual realms are linked by universal sympathy, a correct alchemical understanding of the properties of matter is indispensable if the soul is to be liberated from its bondage in the body. By contrast, the magical books in the Thebes cache contain an enormous variety of material, from simple spells to the *apathanatismos* in the famous Paris magical papyrus (*PGM* IV), a rite for obtaining a divine revelation by means of a spiritual initiation, a 'mystery'. The eliciting of oracles was one of the magicians' common concerns; and, like all magic, the rite in *PGM* IV was in principle valid for any user, who had only to purify himself by a period of asceticism and abstinence, and then insert his name and the subject of his enquiry at the appropriate points in the rite. But the experience envisaged, during the rite, is one of ascent, rebirth, vision and (oracular) communication. The rebirth is a noetic experience, conferring immortality (*apathanatismos*); and the vision is of the supreme god Aion, the presence of whose overwhelming power brings the enquirer to the point of death. We are reminded both of the mystery religions, and

³⁰ Fowden (1993b) 168–72; also 89–91, 120–6 (alchemy).

of the Hermetic initiation. Indeed, another item from the Thebes cache, *PGM* XIII, alludes explicitly to Hermetic texts; while *PGM* III, which may belong to the same library, includes a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for the gift of divine knowledge that is also found in Latin at the end of the Hermetic *Asclepius*, and in Coptic among the Hermetic texts included in Nag Hammadi Codex VI. The late antique magician was of course a natural opportunist, who no more hesitated to purloin a philosophical text if he thought it would serve his purpose, than to invoke the powerful name of 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' (Origen, *c. Cels.* IV.33), the jealous god who brooked no competition. But this approach had a vigour and open-mindedness about it that made the occult sciences one of the more dynamic aspects of late polytheism, destined to influence deeply both Christian and Muslim civilization. One can well understand why they became so suspect to authority, whatever its religious allegiance.

Authority's objection to the occult sciences would have been milder were it not for authority's own belief that they were highly effective. A papyrus of 198/9 contains a ban by the then prefect of Egypt on any type of oracular consultation, issued no doubt at Septimius Severus' instance.³¹ Yet Septimius was the first to resort to diviners when he wanted to know what fate held in store.³² He was said to have married Julia Domna because her horoscope stated that she would wed an emperor; and Julia was herself a characteristic product of her native Syria, where astrology had long been an organic part of, for example, the various local cults of the world-ruler and creator Bel. Though the influence of these Syrian cults on third-century polytheism has at times been exaggerated, the sight of Septimius and Julia, 'Assyrian Cythereia, the uneclipsed Moon' (Oppian, *Cyneg.* I.7; cf. Ghedini (1984) 148–51), holding court beneath palace ceilings painted with the imperial horoscope (including deliberate mistakes), can only have encouraged their contemporaries' mania for astrology.³³

We see the same mingling of formal cult and the occult arts in Egypt – indeed, the student of Egyptian religion and magic soon discovers that the distinction does not exist. For their part, Greeks and Romans knew that no magician was more potent than a Memphite priest; but in their own tradition the distinction between religion and magic was ingrained. Philostratus illustrates this well with his story about how the Eleusinian hierophant refused to initiate Apollonius of Tyana because he was a magician – to which Apollonius replied that the real reason was that, 'knowing, as I do, more about the rite than you, still I come to be initiated, as if you

³¹ Rea (1977). ³² *SHA*, *Sev.* 2.8–9, 3.9, 4.3 etc.

³³ Dio, LXXVI.11. Cf. Turcan (1978) 1031–5, on Septimius' successors' use of astrology to legitimate their power.

were wiser than me' (Philostr. *Vit. Apoll.* iv.18). Philostratus' *Life*, which lays great emphasis on Apollonius' supernatural powers, yet pretends to absolve him of the charge that he was just a magician, is symptomatic of the ever more widespread indecision in educated minds – Porphyry was another example – between the safety of traditional intellectual discourse, and indeed of traditional cult, and the opportunities of the occult. At his trial (under Antoninus Pius) on charges of practising magic, Apuleius played on this same ambiguity. If the prosecution accepts the common belief that a magician is one who, 'holding commerce with the immortal gods, has the power to bring about whatever he wishes by the extraordinary force of certain spells' (Apul. *Apol.* 26), how do they dare attack such a person? Since they have attacked him, clearly they do not believe the charge – and their double standard is exposed.

The only convincing late polytheist thinkers were those who addressed themselves seriously to this problem, either by offering, as Plotinus, a philosophy that so far transcended conventional cult, astrology and magic as to make the problems they presented seem trivial,³⁴ or by accepting, as Iamblichus, that the magician, the diviner, the pious worshipper of the gods, and the philosopher are all in possession of parts of the truth, which when put together form that 'universal way for the soul's liberation' which, according to Augustine, Porphyry had sought in vain (*Regr. fr.* 12 Bidez, 302 Smith).

³⁴ E.g. Plot. ii.3[52].15.

CHAPTER 17

LATE POLYTHEISM

CHAPTER 17B

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE GODS

GARTH FOWDEN

The late polytheist world-view, as formulated by intellectuals, affords the historian a first orientation amidst an exceptionally complex body of evidence. But daily contact with the gods came to most people not, of course, through philosophy or theurgy, nor even the occult sciences, but through public and domestic cult, dreams, the rites of the dead, and so on. Here, too, the central problem is always how to deal correctly with, and exploit, divine power, in order to maintain personal and communal identity. It is only secondarily, if at all, the pursuit of what we call 'religious experience', or of ethical progress. Immersion in the details of cultic practice provides evidence to support these generalizations about mentality, and allows others to emerge.

I. SHRINES AND CULTS

The building of temples was among the most fundamental human social acts. Temples were at once the distinction (or 'eyes') and the essence (or 'soul') of any settlement, whether town or village (Lib. *Or.* xxx.9, 42). As the sixth-century historian John of Ephesus wrote of the mighty 'house of idols' at Heliopolis (Baalbek), 'the adornments of that house were so wonderful that, when the misguided pagans [considered] the strength of that house, they glorified even more in their misguidedness' (*ap.* ps.-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *Chronicle* (Chabot (1933) = CSCO 104) 130; tr. A. Palmer). Besides making public statements about the power of the gods and the role of religion in the community, the temples also said something about the structure of the society that made them. By proclaiming themselves, as they often did, the fruit of individual generosity, they averted the envy that might be the downfall of the wealthy. They stood for the public, integrated aspect of society – hence also the privilege of asylum they sometimes enjoyed.¹ The major temples often clustered around the noisy marketplace,

¹ Brown (1978) 35–6; Drijvers (1982).

or else, especially if they were oracles (as at Didyma by Miletus) or healing places (as at Pergamum), kept *extra muros* a deliberate distance from the intrusiveness of city life. But there were less conspicuous side-street temples too, with a more defined clientele; while Mithras' adepts often met in subterranean shrines, 'plunged in the concealing squalor of darkness', as a Christian critic put it (Firm. Mat. *De Errore Prof. Rel.* v.2). The situation and appearance of temples reflected varieties of piety, and evoked various responses.

The man in the street most easily and frequently participated in public religion in large cities that could support elaborate daily rites. A probably third-century sacred law from Ephesus sets the scene:

The Prytanis [i.e. the senior magistrate] must kindle fire on all the altars and offer up incense and sacred herbs; on the customary days he brings animals to be sacrificed to the gods, 365 altogether . . . , at his own expense. The public hierophant shows and teaches him how each (sacrifice) is customarily (offered) to the gods. He must have hymns sung during the sacrifices, processions and nocturnal ceremonies which are prescribed by custom; and he must pray for the sacred (Roman) senate, the people of Rome and the people of Ephesus.

(*I. Eph.* 10)

During the major festivals of Artemis, the emperor too was honoured – it was on such occasions that the imperial cult came closest to everyday life.² But when the novelist Xenophon the Ephesian describes one of these festivals (1.2–3), it is the seeing and being seen, the sociable aspect of religion, that most strikes us. Watched by a great crowd of local people and strangers, all the young men and women of Ephesus set off in procession along the sacred way that led from the city to its great sanctuary without the walls. Amidst clouds of incense and bearing aloft the sacred objects, the procession moves towards the entrance to the temples of Artemis, where sacrifice is offered. And sacrifice, as Xenophon did not need to add, was an occasion for feasting, drinking, music and dancing. No wonder this was the customary time for the choosing of brides – Xenophon's hero and heroine duly meet and fall in love. And it was precisely the enjoyability of such celebrations that also induced, for a space, a sense of common identity among citizens who were all too often at each other's throat. At a time when the plague was raging in Ephesus, Philostratus represents Apollonius of Tyana as using processions and ritual and even the communal slaying of a scapegoat, to focus energies on what united rather than what divided (*Vit. Apoll.* iv.10).

Worshippers came to the city from the countryside too: an edict composed in idiosyncratic and colourful style, apparently by the emperor

² Price (1984) 103–4.

Caracalla personally, and preserved on a papyrus at Giessen, mentions approvingly the Egyptian peasants who flocked into Alexandria, driving their sacrificial beasts before them, for the festivals of the great god Serapis.³ Villagers also had their own strictly local feasts: a recently published inscription from the borderlands of Bithynia and Phrygia records how, in June/July 210, Chrestus, son of Glycon, set up a statue on an altar in honour of Zeus Bennios, for the salvation of Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Geta, and for the sake of his village and its crops. An ox was sacrificed, and some 200 litres of wine were provided too, along with a large bronze wine-vessel.⁴ In these villages along the edge of the dry central Anatolian plateau, such summer festivities will have been major annual events.

But our sources' understandable interest in festivals should not mislead us into assuming that everyday worship was most characteristically communal, as in mainstream Christianity and Islam. Apuleius, describing a man whom he wishes to depict as an exemplar of religious indifference, redresses the balance:

He has never prayed to any god, nor attended any temple. When he passes by some shrine, he thinks it sacrilege to put hand to lips in a gesture of reverence. Not even to the gods of country life, who nourish and clothe him, does he offer first-fruits from his crops, his vines or his flocks. On his estate there is no sanctuary, no consecrated place or sacred grove . . . Those who have visited him say they have not seen so much as an anointed stone or a branch wreathed with garlands.

(Apul. *Apol.* 56)

In sharp contrast is the pious traveller, who never fails to notice by the wayside:

an altar garlanded with flowers, a leaf-shaded grotto, an oak loaded with horns [from a sacrificial animal], a beech crowned with animal-skins, a sacred hillock within an enclosure, a tree-trunk with an image carved in it, a turf altar moistened with a libation, or a stone smeared with oil.

(Apul. *Flor.* 1)

and who does not omit, when he comes upon some such sacred grove or holy place, 'to make a vow, to place an offering of fruit, to sit a little' (Apul. *Flor.* 1; cf. Lucian, *Alex.* 30). In short, Apuleius takes for granted that the most characteristic, everyday piety is voluntary, individual and non-liturgical, if not necessarily private, and certainly not secret (a Christian perversion).⁵

As Apuleius notes, even the mere passer-by made some gesture of reverence to the gods' shrines; but to enter the sacred area one had to be in a state of purity. What purity meant – assuming it was not, as in the native

³ *P. Giss.* 40 II = *P. Giss. Lit.* 6.2. ⁴ Sahin (1978).

⁵ Cf. Porph. *Abst.* II.16, esp. 4–5; Maximus of Madauros *ap. Aug. Ep.* 16.3; Veyne (1989). Apuleius is a second-century source, but such practices did not go out of fashion: Arnob. *Adv. Nat.* 1.39.

Egyptian cults, a priestly prerogative – might be spelled out by an inscription, whose requirement that, for example, one should not have had recent contact with a corpse or a woman might at the one extreme be flouted, at the other treated as the outward expression of an inner, ascetic ideal.⁶ Many made a point of visiting a temple at the start of their day. Prayer offered to the rising or setting sun was thought especially appropriate, and might, again, be interpreted on various levels, even as a simile for the philosopher's encounter with the One.⁷ In many temples the very stones of which they were made, and the polished surfaces of the cult-statues, were covered with texts, sometimes public or priestly records formally inscribed, sometimes the scribbled or scratched prayers of ordinary worshippers.⁸ One might also leave a lamp, a statuette or other offering, accompanied perhaps by a votive inscription; or one could burn some incense. Special occasions called for animal sacrifice, repeated prohibitions of which prove its continued popularity through the fourth century. The number of victims might be recorded with pride in an inscription,⁹ though by now some intellectuals found it hard to justify blood offerings, and preferred (as the Hermetists) 'spiritual sacrifice'. That Marcus Aurelius as well as Julian was criticized for his extravagant hecatombs, and the mindless feasting that ensued,¹⁰ shows that some polytheists had doubts, even before Christians began to make their voice widely heard.

The increasing controversiality of sacrifice proves that polytheism had no more ceased to evolve than mankind had tired of life, or stopped wondering what lay beyond it. The austere old Roman Jupiter, for example, may have been around a long time by 'late' antiquity, but each generation recast the gods in its own image, and Jupiter was still the object of individual as well as official veneration,¹¹ while even his public cult was given a new twist by Diocletian (see p. 558). If the statues and paintings seen by temple visitors looked, and were interpreted by their guardians, much as always, their power to mould the way gods were envisaged and dreamed of had not diminished.¹² In non-Graeco-Roman traditions, native gods were increasingly depicted in Roman guise, while anthropomorphic statues had for some time been progressively replacing older, aniconic cult-objects.¹³ The value of regular, daily temple services, deeply ingrained anyway in Egypt and other parts of the east, was now widely recognized in the Graeco-Roman world too,¹⁴ and received official reinforcement in Maximin Daza's and later Julian's attempts at reform (see pp. 559–60; *CAH* XIII.543–8).

⁶ *LSCG* no.139 (Lindos, second century) requires purity of mind as well as body; and see Porph. *Abst.* II.19.

⁷ Fowden (1993b) 127. ⁸ Apul. *Apol.* 54; Beard (1991).

⁹ E.g. Brogan and Smith (1984) 262 (no. 6). ¹⁰ Amm. Marc. XXII.12.6; XXV.4.17.

¹¹ Alföldy (1989) 84–9. ¹² Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* 102–67.

¹³ E.g. Harl (1987) 79–81; Le Glay (1966) 61–95, 499–502. ¹⁴ Nilsson (1974) 381–3.

Sensitivity to the divine energies that infused the cult-statues, and the wish to exploit them as fully as possible, doubtless contributed to this development.

It has been suggested that individuals' piety too was evolving, towards greater warmth and intimacy with the gods.¹⁵ Though subjective, this is not an inherently improbable judgement. Late antique polytheists do seem to have felt a particular affection for gods like Heracles, Dionysus, Asclepius and Mithras who understood the struggle of mortal existence. The gods were expected to be *epēkooi*, good listeners; and that was easier if they could move around with their clients. To this end many carried on their person small images, sometimes in silver or gold, of a favoured divinity.¹⁶ Since one did not lightly build temples or set up cult-statues to new gods, these small images are a surer guide to fashion: it is likely for example that those which depict the serpent Glycon went into circulation soon after Alexander of Abonouteichos invented his oracle, in the mid-second century (Lucian, *Alex.*). Statuettes of Tyche (Fortune), in all her guises, were especially common, and warn against the easy assumption that divine personifications seemed less real than gods who had personalities and histories of their own. One of the accusations against Apuleius at his trial on charges of practising magic was that he carried with him a wooden statuette of Mercury. His defence contains a fine account of the different levels (excepting the magical, which the prosecution had already drawn attention to) at which such an image might be worshipped, and underlines again the individualism of polytheist piety. The Mercury-statuettes, Apuleius explains, is both a substitute for the public cult-statues, and an object for philosophical reflection. On feast days he offers it incense, a libation or even a victim, as well as prayer; while as a Platonist he is in the habit of addressing it as 'the King', the supreme Sovereign of all creation. Such statuettes might also be placed at the foot of a cult-statue, and revered in the public temples. Rumour told that it was by leaving behind burning candles after offering prayer in precisely such circumstances that in 362 the philosopher Asclepiades started the fire which destroyed the temple of Apollo at Daphne (Antioch).¹⁷ A few years later, the theurgist Nestorius saved Athens from an earthquake by praying to a statuette of Achilles which he placed before the image of Athena in the Parthenon.¹⁸ The interplay in this incident of ancient public context and secret theurgical ritual is highly characteristic of late polytheism.

There is, it will be noticed, abundant evidence for spiritual interpretations of the everyday rites of religion. This encourages a false perspective: our literary sources, the only ones which express such nuances, are written by the only people likely to take the trouble to analyse them. Religious

¹⁵ Veyne (1986) and (1989).

¹⁶ Giammarco Razzano (1988) 340–1.

¹⁷ Amm. Marc. xxii.13.

¹⁸ Zos. iv.18.

emotion, though, is probably another matter, though again the sources are inevitably literary. Emotion is often attributed to 'warm' oriental cults rather than 'frigid' Greek or, worse still, Roman ones; but statues generally stirred more than merely aesthetic reverence. An image of Asclepius Paean could be described by an onlooker as infused by the god's own powers, a manifestation of the indwelling god himself (Callistr. *Stat.* 10); while Eunapius recalls how, after a particularly brilliant performance by the rhetor Prohaeresius, 'all who were present licked the sophist's chest as though it were some inspired statue; some kissed his feet, some his hands' (Eunap. *Vit. Soph.* x.5.4). This comparison of learned and holy men to statues occurs frequently in late polytheist literature, and would strike us as less odd, if we ourselves were capable of a more vivid appreciation of statues. Not that late polytheists necessarily let themselves get carried away in temples. There are some amusing stories about sharp exchanges between worshippers and their gods. Asclepius' customers, forced to sleep in his temples in order to receive a dream-oracle, were particularly tetchy. An arrogant second-century sophist, informed that he might get over his arthritis if he refrained from cold drinks, enquired whether the prescription would have been the same for a cow similarly afflicted; while Proclus' teacher Plutarch, told to eat pork, wanted to know whether the god would have said the same to a Jew. Caught off guard by such impertinence, Asclepius altered the prescription.¹⁹

II. SPECIAL RELATIONSHIPS

With Asclepius' cures, though, we reach a type of relationship with the gods that was out of the ordinary, not just a matter of the everyday paying of respect. The need for such special relationships arose either from some objective problem, such as illness, or, less commonly, from what one might call intellectual or spiritual curiosity. The former might well, of course, stimulate the latter. Yet it is not easy to enter into the private thoughts in public sanctuaries of the less educated classes.

A dim beginning can be made with the North African 'Saturn steles', erected in cult-places to record sacrifices and mark buried votive desposits offered to the Africans' supreme god, the Punic Baal and Latin Saturn.²⁰ Though by the third century the Saturn cult had been heavily Romanized, and even in the countryside was usually conducted in Romano-African temples rather than the traditional open-air enclosures, still it retained important local and Semitic elements. The steles depict the god and his

¹⁹ Philostr. *Vit. Soph.* 535; Damasc. *Isid. fr.* 218. The priggish Libanius knew better, of course: *Or.* 1.143.

²⁰ Le Glay (1966) and (1988).

cult as seen by ordinary people, mainly indigenous peasants; and they describe in symbolic language Saturn's activity as lord of the heavens, the fertile earth and the world beyond the tomb. Worshipped in association with numerous other divinities, Saturn touched on every conceivable aspect of human life. The warm piety he evoked is expressed by a dedication put up near Carthage in the summer of 283, by C. Manius Felix Fortunatianus, 'priest, warned in dreams, commanded by the divine power (*numen*) of Saturn. I, Manius,' the inscription continues, 'have discharged my vow and dedicated a sacrificial victim, for the sake of my faith assured and my health (*salus*) preserved' (*AE* 1975.874).

The conflicts assuaged – and sometimes even generated – by religious belief are thrown into particularly sharp relief by the 'confession steles' that emanate from the indigenous temples of rural northeast Lydia and neighbouring parts of Phrygia, a region noted in the ancient sources for its austere morality.²¹ These are votive inscriptions, recording offerings made by afflicted individuals in return for healing effected by a particular god. The affliction is understood as a punishment, and the misdeed – a theft perhaps, or an illicit liaison – is identified, or at least alluded to, often after the god has appeared in a dream. Thus a woman, Claudia Bassa, dedicated a stele dated 253/4 to Zeus of the Twin Oaks, 'having been tormented for four years, and not believing in the god. But finding out for what I suffered, and giving thanks, I put up the stele' (Petzl (1994) 20–I no. 12).

The two inscriptions just quoted are untypical of their genres in that they allude to misfortune's toll on faith. In most people, vague but persistent anxieties about family, property, health and salvation intensified awareness of dependence on the gods and longing to communicate with them. We see this clearly in the second- and early third-century inscriptions which tell us all we know about the cult of the 'Holy and Righteous' God(s),²² some of whose ordinary, rural worshippers in Phrygia and neighbouring regions conceived of them as angels rather than gods, and in doing so recognized a higher divinity with whom it was less easy to communicate, but who expected ethical standards from human kind. The implied problem of mediation was of some concern; but for most it was subordinate to the more direct question of how, precisely, one made contact with an angel or a god, if he did not take the trouble to appear to one in a dream. Or how did one set about ensuring that such a dream would come?

Of the services offered by magicians and astrologers, something has already been said. They were handy and relatively cheap, but not always successful. Alternatively, there were numerous *healing-shrines*, a specialized form of what we more generally classify as *oracles*. The *mysteries* must also be considered, mixing as they did public pomp with secret initiation; and

²¹ Mitchell, *Anatolia* 1.189–95.

²² Riel (1991), (1992a) and (1992b).

all these cults gave rise to the phenomenon of *pilgrimage*. These themes can be tied to a firm third-century context through the person of the emperor Caracalla, who is usually treated as a regrettable ruler, but was also a tormented individual. Soon after he murdered his brother Geta, Caracalla, oppressed by guilt, fell ill in body and mind, and began to have dreams in which he was pursued by his father and brother, carrying swords. These dreams Caracalla understood, as any other contemporary would have done, as direct divine punishment and warning. Thenceforth and until he died, his constant travels were motivated no less by his search for a cure than by considerations of state or his other fixation, the imitation of Alexander. He conjured spirits and importuned the gods both in person and by messenger, with 'prayers, sacrifices and votive offerings'; but 'he received help neither from Apollo Grannus nor from Asclepius nor from Serapis'. Cassius Dio's observation (LXXVII.15.6) shows that Caracalla invoked the most potent divinities of the age. Indeed, Caracalla's experiences provide an insight into what seemed most dynamic in late polytheism to one of the few people able to take an overall view of the empire's religious traditions.

We may begin with Asclepius the Saviour, *philanthrōpos* and healer *par excellence*, and one of Christianity's firmest opponents. On his way east in the winter of 214–15, Caracalla visited the god's shrine at Pergamum. This was the Roman world's most respected healing-centre, and *ipso facto* one of its greatest holy places,²³ for the act of healing established a particularly intense personal relationship with the divine. The sanctuary had been much extended during the second century, but had retained the special atmosphere of all Asclepius' temples, where people stayed night after night, sleeping in the sacred area, longing for the god to come in their dreams and prescribe a cure. At Epidaurus,²⁴ the centuries-long accumulation of inscriptions and votives displayed today in the museum is eloquent of the durable, vital piety of Asclepius' adepts. And it was often a reflective piety too, for remarkable cures gave pause for thought. In the long hours of waiting, conversation centered on the shrine and its patron, or even strayed into the wider realms of theology and philosophy.²⁵ At Pergamum, literary men and philosophers held forth to the captive audience, while the sanctuary's dedication to Zeus–Asclepius, and the various altars set up there and elsewhere in the town 'to all the gods and goddesses', suggest that the élite of worshippers was much given to syncretistic ways of envisaging the gods. There is no sign, though, that such ideas (also attested at Epidaurus) caught on with the average visitor, who continued to address his prayers to the old-fashioned Asclepius.

²³ Habicht (1969) 6–18; Le Glay (1976). Caracalla's visit: Habicht (1969) esp. 18, 33–8; Price (1984) 152–3, 253; Harl (1987) 55–7; Kampmann (1992–3).

²⁴ Nilsson (1974) 336–7. ²⁵ Cf. Philostr. *Vit. Soph.* 568.

Caracalla too behaved very traditionally. 'He had his fill of dreams [*sc.* incubation treatment]' (Herod. iv.8.3), he made Pergamum 'Thrice Temple-Warden' (a privilege connected with the cult of the emperor), a temple was dedicated to him on the theatre-terrace (and others probably restored), and he was depicted in a statue as a priest, and on coins in the act of sacrificing to Asclepius. His visit was the last major event in the history of a shrine about which we hear nothing more after the mid-third century. But Epidaurus flourished well into the fourth century. So too did Asclepius' sanctuary at Aegeae in Cilicia.²⁶ This temple was said to have been lived in by the young Apollonius of Tyana, whose native town was adorned with a shrine for his cult by Caracalla, and whose biography was commissioned from Philostratus by Caracalla's mother. Apollonius turned Aegeae into a veritable school of philosophers, and took every opportunity to draw out publicly, before the ordinary faithful, those terrible connections between conduct, conscience and affliction of which the authors of the 'confession steles' had been made so painfully aware.²⁷ No doubt Apollonius' Aegeae was little changed in Philostratus' day. Caracalla may well have visited it shortly before he arrived at Antioch; and indeed it remained a major centre of healing and piety into the reign of Constantine, who tried to close the temple for that reason.

There was, though, room for more than one healer-god. Of the other two Cassius Dio mentions in connection with Caracalla, Apollo Grannus was renowned among the Celts. His cult is especially well attested in the frontier regions, and was often associated with springs.²⁸ Recent archaeological discoveries suggest that the shrine Caracalla visited, during the German campaigns of (probably) 212 and (certainly) 213, was at Faimingen on the upper Danube. The god seems to have profited from the occasion more than the emperor. His temple was rebuilt in stone, in the Roman manner. And Caracalla's patronage undoubtedly gave a wider impetus to the cult, which had been little known before the second century, but from then on had spread throughout the west. A Dacian inscription from the 230s calls Apollo Grannus 'the one who always and everywhere listens to prayer' (*epēkoos*) (*SEG* xxxiii.589) – except, it seems, Caracalla's.

As for Serapis, Caracalla was able to invoke him when, turning briefly aside from the fateful road to Persia, he visited Alexandria in 215. This visit was noted for the bloody massacre it occasioned, but also for the reverence Caracalla accorded the city's famous god, in whose temple he resided and insistently sacrificed.²⁹ The 'philoserapis' emperor also built Serapis (and Isis?) a sanctuary on the Quirinal in Rome itself.³⁰ The Serapis

²⁶ Ziegler (1994). ²⁷ Philostr. *Vit. Apoll.* 1.10–11.

²⁸ Weisgerber (1975) 108, 115–21; Dietz (1985). ²⁹ Malaise (1972) 439–42.

³⁰ Beard, North and Price (1998) 1.254.

cult was popular throughout the empire, often in association with that of Isis, as on a Spanish dedication of this period, which also names Kore, Apollo Grannus and the similarly Celtic Mars Sagatus (*AE* 1968.230). At Timgad, in the largest religious complex ever discovered in North Africa, Serapis was worshipped, uniquely, alongside Asclepius and Dea Africa. An inscription records an elaborate redecoration of the temple completed under Caracalla.³¹ Despite the fact that the Severans' personal contribution to the process may have been less decisive than was once thought, it is clear that the Roman pantheon was ever more open to the gods of the orient, though some, notably Mithras and Jupiter Dolichenus, remained aloof, while those who entered were expected to conform to Roman norms.

That Caracalla, who 'made full use of every oracle' (Herod. iv.12.3), took up residence in the Alexandrian Serapeum strongly suggests that he was hoping for a dream-oracle. Indeed, oracle-giving played a central role in both physical healing and the easing of psychological tension, to which a shifting of responsibility away from the enquirer no doubt contributed.³² Asclepius naturally came to be regarded as a major oracular authority, even independently of his healing function.³³ But still he could not challenge Apollo. The inscriptions of Didyma and Claros, by showing that these two great Apolline oracles flourished through the second century and into the third,³⁴ have underlined the fact that Plutarch's famous pamphlet *On the Obsolescence of Oracles* applies mainly to Delphi, which impoverished Greece could no longer support in the style to which it had become accustomed – though its cultural influence lingered on, witness the Pythian games attested at various cities, even in the more difficult periods of the third century.³⁵ Christian apologists who crowed about a general demise of oracles were simply lying. Formal, institutionalized oracles continued in late antiquity to respond to real personal, local and regional needs, as well as flattering the pretensions of the urban élites who ran them. Nonetheless, the expense and complexity of these grand, ancient oracles made them especially sensitive to social and political upheaval. Claros, which served mainly the cities of inner Asia Minor, the Black Sea coasts, Thrace and Macedonia, and with Didyma and Aegeae benefited from being on a busy sea-route, apparently succumbed to the disruption caused to the region's economy and communications by the mid-third-century invasions. Didyma became a fortified refugee camp; and though Diocletian patronized and consulted the oracle, just as Julian tried to resuscitate Apollo of Daphne, such projects could not succeed without local interest. In the post-crisis retrenchment elaborate oracles, like local mints (and, no doubt, Pythian games), were often found superfluous.

³¹ Le Glay (1991). ³² K. Thomas (1978) 288. ³³ Jones (1986) 44.

³⁴ Parke (1985) 69–111, 142–70; and, on oracles generally, Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* 168–261.

³⁵ *Bull. Ép.* (1982) 450.

The business transacted at oracles was mostly quite practical. Cities enquired what to do about some natural catastrophe or barbarian incursion, or how best to honour a particular god. Private individuals enquired about their everyday cares, as one Etrenion at a temple in the Fayum:

To my lord Socnopaeus, the great god, and the associated gods . . . if it is not granted that my wife Ammonous should return to me of her own free will, but I must go out so that she comes back, give me this.

(*P. Berlin* 21712 = Aly (1987) 99–100)

The papyrus slip was found with several others, still in the temple, so presumably patience was advised, by the return to Etrenion of the slip on which he had written the alternative proposition. Though he wrote in Greek, he preserved the native Egyptian formula, attested in similar demotic and Coptic documents.³⁶

But at Talmis (Kalabsha), far to the south in Nubia, a traveller asked the god Mandulis a question about himself: 'Are you the Sun?' On the temple wall he painted an account of the vision Mandulis granted him:

You showed yourself to me in the golden stream, as you traversed in your bark the heavenly vault . . . Having bathed yourself in the holy water of immortality, you appeared as an infant. You came, rising at the appointed hour, to your shrine, bestowing the breath of life and great power on your statue and your sanctuary. Then, Mandulis, I knew you to be the Sun, the lord who beholds all things, the universal king, Aion the almighty.

(*IME* 166)

'Theological' responses of this sort are also known from Didyma and Claros;³⁷ but this text from Talmis shows that a sufficiently receptive enquirer did not need a philosophically trained priesthood to mediate between him and his god. As already mentioned, there are philosophical influences to be found even in the books of the magicians, who dominated the 'private sector' of the oracular business.

In dealing with healing shrines and oracles, we find ourselves at that point where the external forms repose directly on what ordinary people regard as indispensable to any religion – not profound ethical or spiritual instruction, or contact with the divine for its own sake, but reassurance and specific assistance in life's uncertainties. Such fundamental needs were also met by the wide range of mainly Greek or oriental mystery cults.³⁸ The mysteries – in the stricter sense of a word casually used in this period – offered a brief but striking, even terrifying, experience of initiation (and perhaps of some sort of 'rebirth'), often understood as union with the god and a promise of a blessed afterlife. Genuinely ecstatic experiences were attained, though we

³⁶ Browne (1987); Frankfurter (1998) 145–97. ³⁷ Mitchell, *Anatolia* II.43–51.

³⁸ Nilsson (1974) 345–72, 622–701; Burkert (1990).

cannot know how often, by for example the adepts of Cybele and Attis – certainly by those who, so notoriously, emasculated themselves in their enthusiasm, but no doubt also by many others who, especially from the third century onwards, submitted themselves to baptism in the blood of a sacrificial bull or ram (*taurobolium/criobolium*). But the mysteries also had deep historical roots and a perfectly down-to-earth human context. Some were associated with the ancient sanctity of particular places, like Eleusis or Samothrace; and though others, such as the mysteries of Dionysus or Isis or Cybele, could be found across the empire, they often retained a strong sense of their ethnic origins. In the cities especially, but also in the countryside, initiates were numerous.³⁹ In particular, the ubiquity of Dionysiac themes on mosaics and sarcophagi is eloquent of this god's special place in late polytheists' everyday thoughts. Caracalla was apparently no exception – 'he even took about with him numerous elephants', recalls Cassius Dio, 'that in this respect too he might seem to be imitating Alexander, or rather Dionysus' (LXXVII.7.4); and he was the first living emperor to be depicted in this guise on coins.⁴⁰ As for Dionysus' humbler initiates, and those in some other mysteries, they usually formed local circles of friends and drinking-companions who helped each other over life's crises, and cared for the memory of the dead. When, in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (XI.28), Lucius mentions that his career in the law courts prospered after his second Isiac initiation, we may suspect that he owed this to help from fellow-adepts – a sort of Masonic network of contacts.

In all the mysteries, special doctrines were imparted, as for example about the afterlife; and use was made of symbols that suggested a profounder, secret content. But 'secret' religion in antiquity was no more than what today we would call 'personal' religion – something that many knew and experienced, but preferred not to noise abroad. Again, some of the more sophisticated initiates, and no doubt hierophants too, like certain prophets at oracular shrines, did interpret the mysteries in a philosophical sense. But in so doing they overshot what most people meant by mysteries no less deliberately than Christian polemicists fell short of it, by dwelling on the ceremonies' obscene or comic aspects. And although the initiation might be repeated, no spiritual progress was implied thereby – except possibly in the cult of Mithras.⁴¹ This reached the peak of its popularity in the earlier part of our period, and was distinctive – perhaps reflecting its mainly military and official milieu – in that it seems to have offered a structured and demanding spiritual 'way' that could be a frame for one's whole life. The more dedicated, at least, among Mithras' adepts became members of a group that was looked after by a 'Pater'; while below this highest grade of initiation were six others,

³⁹ Apul. *Apol.* 55; *Met.* XI.10; MacMullen (1987) 47–8.

⁴⁰ Harl (1987) 48.

⁴¹ Gordon (1994) 465–7.

each associated with a particular stage in the process of instruction, discipline and purification. All the mysteries proclaimed rebirth; but only in the Mithras cult could one obtain a sense of something gradually and systematically achieved by oneself, rather than given. Even more than Asclepius, Mithras got his worshippers involved, and drew them from social classes of no particular education, while still leaving scope for the more philosophical interpretations offered by Porphyry in his treatise *On the Cave of the Nymphs*.

A final, practical point that needs to be made about these various media – healing shrines, oracles and mysteries – by which special relationships with the gods were established, is that even in towns they were not always ready to hand. Hence the necessity and even popularity of what we may loosely call pilgrimage. As historical religions, Christianity and Islam were to develop pilgrimage into a major form of religious expression. But the historicity of the many gods was variously estimated. Egyptians saw nothing strange in visiting the graves of their gods; but most people found Egyptians slightly peculiar. The Cretans showed both the birthplace and the grave of Zeus, but for precisely that reason were deemed arrant liars. On the other hand, pious polytheists did make a point of visiting particularly well-known temples, if they had a special reason or were on the road anyway. In that sense, Caracalla was a typical pilgrim, merely better travelled than most. Hence, for example, his visit to Troy, his first action after crossing into Asia Minor (214). There, recalling Alexander and, no doubt, Apollonius of Tyana, and anticipating Julian, he honoured Achilles with a statue, sacrifices and a race round his neglected tomb. Perhaps he even contributed something to the remarkable popularity of Achilles in late antique art, literature and piety.⁴² It was during a similar excursion three years later, to the temples of the Syrian moon god Sin at Harran near the Persian frontier, that the ‘most pious’ emperor, as Caracalla liked to be thought and called,⁴³ was murdered while relieving himself by the roadside. Imperial visits were of course major events in the history of even the grandest shrines; and in general festivals and pilgrimages had tremendous social and economic significance in a world where, otherwise, many people scarcely moved beyond their village. Indeed, a major shrine was an incalculable asset to the city that controlled it, attracting, especially for festivals, crowds who spent money, athletes who brought glory, rhetors and philosophers who might, as at Pergamum or Delphi, turn the sanctuary into a year-round cultural centre. This was one of the reasons why the city élites, who profited most, were still so strongly attached to polytheism at the beginning of the fourth century.⁴⁴

⁴² Von Gonzenbach (1979).

⁴³ Dio, LXXVII.16.1; Oliver (1978).

⁴⁴ Ziegler (1994) 206–7.

III. GODS OF HEARTH AND GRAVE

Even in the later fourth century, according to Jerome, Rome twinkled at nightfall with a myriad candles and lamps lit before domestic shrines;⁴⁵ and we may be sure that this was one of the very last aspects of self-consciously polytheist cult to fall into disuse. Of the mentalities and practices of temple ritual, domestic cults were a mere extension.⁴⁶ So much is implied by Apuleius, describing his personal devotions before his statuette of Mercury. Mystery-initiates might, in the recesses of their homes, take out the symbols of their faith and venerate them, but on the whole polytheists were suspicious of religion not conducted in the light of day according to the established rites – it might so easily be magic, or Christianity.⁴⁷ Domestic shrines took their tone from the public temples, and did not lag behind them in the variety of gods, including the emperor, that they served. In a single late *lararium* from a substantial residence in Rome were discovered statues or busts of Isis–Fortuna, Serapis, Jupiter, Diana–Hecate, Venus, Mars, Hercules, a bacchant, Horus, Harpocrates and others, neatly arranged in a series of niches. The same house contained a small private Mithraeum.⁴⁸ A shrine in an Ostian bakery, constructed c. 210–15, contained some fifty bronze and silver statuettes and a marble one of a lar, and paintings which have been identified, with various degrees of probability, as representations of Silvanus, the Dioscuri, Alexander the Great (no surprise under Caracalla), Augustus, a genius, Fortuna, Annona, Isis and Harpocrates.⁴⁹ And it would be perverse to omit mention of the best-known collection of household gods attested from this period, the emperor Severus Alexander's two *lararia*. In these he supposedly 'kept statues of the deified emperors – of whom, however, only the best had been selected – and also of certain holy souls, among them Apollonius . . . Christ, Abraham, Orpheus and others of this same character and, besides, the portraits of his ancestors', not to mention Vergil, Cicero, Achilles and other heroes, and Alexander the Great (*SHA, Alex. Sev.* 29, 31). But we may suppose that this particular collection of household deities, if it ever existed, would have been less strenuously eclectic had Elagabalus' successor not been forced to cultivate such a catholic image for public consumption (see chapter 17c, p. 555).

From the identity of style between public and domestic devotion we should deduce the warmth of the former rather than the formality of the latter. The safety and regularity of home life in even its most insignificant aspects was felt to depend on the maintenance of the domestic cults,

⁴⁵ Jerome, *In Esaiam* xvi.57.7.8 (CCSL 73A, pp. 646–7). ⁴⁶ Frankfurter (1998) 131–42.

⁴⁷ Apul. *Apol.* 55; Min. Fel. *Oct.* 10; Maximus of Madauros *ap. Aug. Ep.* 16.3.

⁴⁸ Stambaugh (1978) 598 and pl. viiiB; Price (1984) 119–20.

⁴⁹ Bakker (1994) 65–6, 145–67, 207–8, 251–73, pls. 85–100.

supplemented by magic and all manner of apotropaic devices – phalli carved on the threshold or the corners of the house, or charms inscribed over doorways to ward off the plague. People felt at home with their gods wherever they encountered them; and the respect the gods were accorded did not preclude their exposure to scenes of daily life. Hence the frequency of religious, especially Dionysiac, themes in the decoration of private houses. Walls and floors were adorned with frescoes or mosaics depicting, not just mythological scenes, but also rituals of the mysteries and other cults, and allegories of mystical philosophical teachings. Archaeologists often assume that such decoration was conceivable only in a room designated for cultic or learned gatherings; but religious themes are far too common to justify so specific an explanation in every case. Separation of sacred and profane is a trait of the Christian rather than the polytheist mind, well illustrated by the extreme rarity of representations of Christ on floor-mosaics, and the ban pronounced in 427 on the depiction on floors even of the cross, for fear it might be trodden on.⁵⁰

The individual's last encounter with his gods came of course at death. Numerous gravestones and sarcophagi survive from our period, but their decorations and inscriptions betray no clear conception (such as one finds in ancient Egyptian tombs) of what the dead were to face. Indeed, many had no such conception – *post mortem nescio* (CIL VI.13101). The majority assumed some sort of bodily afterlife, pleasurable or punishing, and kept their dead going with offerings of food and drink. Those even remotely accessible to philosophical ideas often believed in the liberation and ascent of the immortal soul to a heavenly dwelling-place; and through the democratization of a once wholly exceptional honour, the deceased was increasingly, though not commonly, spoken of and depicted as a god or goddess.⁵¹ But it is probably not in the sphere of belief that we should seek the explanation for a major change in the funerary customs of the western provinces which, though it began in the second century, became generalized in the third – namely the switch from cremation to inhumation.⁵² At so early a date, this can hardly have been Christianity's doing. It is also worth noting that, during the transition period, the two practices co-existed – as had indeed been the case earlier, though with a strong preference for burning in the west, and burial in the east. Clearly, no serious issue of principle was involved. Indeed, the variety of custom underlines polytheism's vagueness on a matter of deep human concern. Here was an important area in which Christianity was attractively explicit, and optimistic.

⁵⁰ CJ 1.8.1.

⁵¹ Waelkens (1983).

⁵² Koch and Sichtermann (1982) 27–30.

CHAPTER 17

LATE POLYTHEISM

CHAPTER 17C

PUBLIC RELIGION

GARTH FOWDEN

The perspective on late polytheism offered in the last two chapters has been primarily that of the individual. But individuals all organized themselves into groups as well: whether families at the graveside of a relative, villagers celebrating the harvest festival, Isiac initiates lending each other a helping hand in cities across the empire, or philosophers gathering round a revered teacher to study. These group identities, transitory or more enduring, were consecrated by the invocation and presence of particular gods. And the sum total of all these individuals, amidst their shifting group allegiances, was Rome's empire. To the empire's public cults as well, individuals were expected to pledge themselves, to strengthen and in turn be strengthened. It is time now to make a more consistent use of this public perspective, both at the centre and in the provinces.

I. THE ROLE OF THE EMPEROR

As the incarnation of human power, the emperor had to be explained and accommodated no less than did the gods, and irrespective of whether one was polytheist, Jew or Christian. Hence the emergence of emperor-cult.¹ Although during their lifetime the emperor and his family were 'divine' (*divi*) rather than 'gods' (*dei*), their statues were revered in conspicuous sanctuaries in even the smallest provincial cities, and they were depicted in the company and often within the very temples of the gods. Rulers might also claim to be specially guarded by certain powerful deities,² or be assimilated to them by being represented with their attributes. The Severans outdid their forerunners in this respect, and Julia Domna's surviving portraits assimilate her to at least ten different goddesses.³ After death, deified rulers might even answer prayer.⁴ And as the third century approached its

¹ Bowersock (1982); Price (1984), although note Mitchell, *Anatolia* 1.224–5; Fishwick (1987–92).

² Nock (1972) 653–75.

³ Ghedini (1984); Fishwick (1987–92) I.1.335–47, and (1992). ⁴ Fishwick (1990).

end, increasingly public and practical consequences began to be drawn from an old idea now reaching maturity, namely that the emperor was the earthly counterpart of divinity, and especially of the divine monarch, Zeus.⁵ Naturally enough, terrestrial power claimed a role in the interpretation of that heavenly power of which it was an image. Although, as *Pontifex Maximus*, the emperor had long been accustomed to acting as ultimate authority in religious matters, it was with the conduct rather than the content of the cults that he had concerned himself,⁶ except in rare cases where public morality was deemed in danger – and even then, the approved remedy was proscription, not reform.⁷ But already in the reign of Aurelian and under the tetrarchy, there began to emerge the revolutionary potential of imperial intervention in doctrine as well as cult. Constantine found Christianity a more rewarding context in which to develop the emperor's role as religious guide, but he did not abandon the imperial cult, preferring simply to purge it of sacrifice (inscription from Hispellum, 333/335: Gascou (1967); Eus. *LC* (ed. Heikel) II.5). And the extent to which imperial intervention might shape the contours of public piety had already been made abundantly clear by Constantine's polytheist predecessors.⁸ The cumulative effect of the emperors' divine status, repeated association with gods, prominent role in their public worship and active involvement in determining priorities for supporting and funding public religion had been gradually to turn the chief public expression of this reality, the imperial cult, into an important focus for polytheists' devotion and a catalyst of their identity, which was an indissoluble complex of political, social and religious elements.⁹ The imperial cult also became a convenient means for marking out the boundaries around the growing Christian community. As Saturninus the proconsul remarked to the intending Scillitan martyrs in 180: 'We too are a religious people, and our religion is a simple one: we swear by the genius of our lord the emperor and we offer prayers for his health – as you also ought to do' (*Passio Sanctorum Scilitanorum* 3, ed. Ruggiero (1991); tr. Musurillo (1972) 87; see also Hopkins (1978) 226–31).

The Severan dynasty's attitude to religion was well exemplified by Caracalla (211–17). It was in the nature of things that an emperor's personal piety could not remain a private matter. Caracalla's frenzied invocation of healing and other gods, described in the previous chapter, duly showed up on the coinage in depictions of Aesculapius, Apollo (Grannus?), Serapis and Diana/Luna (Sin). Two less expected figures who make an appearance on Caracalla's coinage, namely Minos and Pluto, are still more suggestive of the ruler's gloomy personal preoccupations. And yet, taken *en bloc*,

⁵ Dvornik (1966) chs. 8 and 10.

⁶ Millar, *ERW* 447–56.

⁷ Nock (1972) 757–66.

⁸ Bagnall (1988); Salzman (1990) 131–7, 179–81, 188–9.

⁹ On the principles as religious paradigm and universal sacrificer, see Gordon (1990).

the religious elements in Caracalla's coinage are conventional, and conform closely to the norms of that *Romanitas* he so vigorously promoted.¹⁰ Admittedly, coin types tend to be conservative – one would hardly guess, from the coinage of this period, the importance of syncretism in late polytheist theology. Even so, all the signs are that Caracalla espoused the usual view of Roman emperors, that religious affairs were an opportunity for self-expression within conventional limits, but not an area for policy-making. Indeed, there was only one conceivable policy: the preservation of what had been handed down, and the extension of its sphere of influence. In the preamble of the *constitutio Antoniniana*, Caracalla duly proclaimed that his motive was a wish to honour the gods and fill their sanctuaries with grateful worshippers (*P. Giss.* 40. 1).¹¹

Elagabalus, who succeeded Caracalla after Macrinus' fleeting reign, and ruled for less than four years (218–22) before being assassinated at the age of seventeen, was an extravagant youth, it is true, but hardly a significant rebel against the Severan norm.¹² Hereditary priest of the Emesene sun god Elagabalus, he was manoeuvred onto the throne by Julia Domna's sister, his grandmother, whose appetite for power required that the young man should neither give undue offence, nor prefer his imperial to his priestly duties. The sacred stone of Emesa, transported to Rome, was a toy whose rapid evolution from distraction to obsession was not foreseen. Its appearance on the coinage, the construction of two Roman temples for its cult, the lavish celebration of festivals, and the strange god's propagation in the provinces (a process obscured by subsequent *damnatio*),¹³ could all be swallowed. But not the attempt to construct a new Capitoline Triad by 'marrying' the divine Elagabalus first to Athena, then to Dea Caelestis; nor the all-too-mortal Elagabalus' marriage to one of the Vestal Virgins. This violence done to what the Roman élite held holiest, and Elagabalus' insistence that all other gods be subordinated to his, hastened his downfall. Yet his desire was to privilege his own god rather than to deny the rest. Though some maintain that Elagabalus aspired to alter radically the religion of Rome, his coinage, taken as a whole, continued to emphasize traditional symbols. Nonetheless, his successor, Severus Alexander (222–35), took care to 'return the statues of the gods, which the previous emperor had moved from their places, to their original temples and shrines' (Herod. vi.1.3). The Emesene betyl disappeared totally from the coins. Severus Alexander was a typical member of his dynasty – conservative, but aware that Roman religion was catholic, especially regarding cults from the orient.

¹⁰ *BCM* v. xxxviii–xliv lists the commoner coin types at this period.

¹¹ *P. Giss.* 40. 1 = *P. Giss. Lit.* 6.1. For a new Roman cult in the Egyptian Fayyum, quite possibly established in response to the *constitutio*, see Beard, North and Price (1998) I.362–3. On the *restitutio* theme in third-century imperial propaganda, see Alföldy (1989) 58–66.

¹² Frey (1989). ¹³ Robert (1989) 161–6.

Respect for tradition was what overwhelmingly characterized the behaviour of the Severans in religious matters. Septimius Severus in particular restored numerous derelict temples throughout the empire, acquitting himself conscientiously of an imperial duty whose neglect could by now become a butt for Christian mockery.¹⁴ Manilius Fuscus, addressing the senate in 203, spoke for the whole establishment:

For the security and eternity of the empire you should frequent, with all due worship and veneration of the immortal gods, the most sacred shrines for the rendering and giving of thanks, so that the immortal gods may pass on to future generations what our ancestors have built up.

(Pighi (1965) 142, tr. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* 464)

Some of this Severan world's most prestigious shrines are enumerated by the lawyer Ulpian: Capitoline Jupiter at Rome, the focus of official piety; Apollo at Didyma, a flourishing oracle; Mars in Gaul, quite possibly the sanctuary at Trier (see pp. 567–8); Athena at Troy; Hercules at Gades (Cadiz); Artemis at Ephesus; the Mother Goddess and Nemesis at Smyrna; and Dea Caelestis at Carthage (*Tit. Ulp.* xxii.6). Although implicit in this list there is much that was in origin neither Greek nor Roman, it is still a very conservative view of what was worthwhile in early third-century religion.

Yet it was a fragile balance that the Severans strove to maintain. Indeed, as representatives of the new elements now entering the Roman élite, they themselves well exemplified the trends that were both codified and encouraged by the *constitutio Antoniniana*. As often happens, conservative patronage ensured that change became irreversible. For the stability of the empire, the results were disastrous. Politics were no longer moulded by senatorial power-brokers in Rome, but by the provinces, or rather their armies, which, in the half-century that followed the demise of the Severan dynasty, tended to choose emperors to suit their own interest, and then seek to impose them by force on the rest. Internal chaos encouraged external intervention; both affected religious life throughout the empire. The charmed world of the Aegean coasts now witnessed the disruption or violation of its famous sanctuaries – the temples of Apollo at Didyma and Artemis at Ephesus, perhaps also the Parthenon at Athens. The traditional cults continued to function, and in places even to flourish;¹⁵ but overall there was a marked decline in the building, repairing and epigraphic habits. Even the priests of Egypt ceased at last to carve the praises of their gods on temple walls and columns.¹⁶

The instinctive reaction of official circles and the army was to cling to, or even try to renew, that traditional Roman religion so well exemplified

¹⁴ E.g. Clem. Alex. *Protr.* iv.52.

¹⁵ Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* 572–85; Mitchell, *Anatolia* I.221–5.

¹⁶ Bagnall, *Egypt* 261–73.

by the festal calendar of the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum* from Dura Europus, drawn up under Severus Alexander.¹⁷ Already, at the celebration in 247 of Rome's thousandth birthday, the only deity given any prominence was Roma Aeterna. There is evidence too, from this period, for a more intense interest in the cult of Vesta.¹⁸ In ordering all his subjects to sacrifice to the gods for the safety of the state, Decius (249–51) was guilty of such heavy handed conservatism (Caracalla had at least offered Roman citizenship as an inducement) that he was led more or less by accident into an innovatory empire-wide persecution of those Christians who refused to obey.¹⁹ That was before the full force of the storm broke over the empire in the 250s and 260s. For Gallienus' reign, various religious and even philosophical initiatives have been claimed; but the more reliable evidence for official behaviour points towards pragmatism, as was natural in the face of so merciless a succession of events.²⁰

The trouble with this dominant conservatism modified by pragmatism was that it sought to hold together a far-flung empire by backing a religious cult based on the polis.²¹ It was left to Aurelian (270–5) to find a more imaginative response, fertilized perhaps by philosophical discourse about the supreme god.²² Having assigned Jupiter a prominent place on his early coinage, he followed up his political and military successes with an attempt to advance Sol to cultic primacy. The immediate inspiration for this reinvigoration of the traditional Roman Sol cult came, it was said, during a vision the emperor saw in the temple of Elagabalus at Emesa, after the fall of Palmyra. After he returned to Rome, he built a magnificent temple of the Sun, gave it a college of priests, and adorned it with Palmyrene booty and statues of the Sun and the Syrian god Bel. The coins proclaimed ORIENS AVG., SOLI INVICTO and even SOL DOMINVS IMPERI ROMANI. Yet it does not seem that there was anything unambiguously 'oriental' in all this. Sol was presented in traditional Roman guise, in an iconography that had been widely used on the coinage since the reign of Septimius Severus. What was more, other gods were neither excluded nor explicitly downgraded.²³ That was one of several lessons of Elagabalus' reign that Aurelian had taken thoroughly on board. For that reason, the Sol cult survived its patron, though Aurelian's murder deprived it of impetus, as well as forestalling a planned persecution of the Christians.

We may safely suppose that Aurelian's Sol cult was intended to benefit the state as well as to promote and express Aurelian himself. The earthly autocrat

¹⁷ Helgeland (1978) 1481–8 (including text and translation of the *Feriale*); Alföldy (1989) 94–102.

¹⁸ Nock (1972) 252–70. ¹⁹ Portmann (1990) 238–41; Selinger (1994).

²⁰ Armstrong (1987). ²¹ Selinger (1994); Rives (1995) 250–61.

²² Halsberghe (1972) 130–71; Turcan (1978) 1064–73; Staerman (1990) 374–9; Göbl (1993) 118, 144, 148 (for the legends quoted below); Hijmans (1996).

²³ *CIL* xi.6308: *Herculi Aug. consorti d.n. Aureliani*.

needed, so Aurelian seems to have felt, a heavenly mirror-image; and once this heavenly autocrat was accepted, his earthly counterpart might expect to be still further magnified.²⁴ Until the death of Severus Alexander, dynastic continuity had powerfully reinforced the other mechanisms, notably the imperial cult, by which legitimacy was conveyed. But now there were no more dynasties; and emperors were difficult to take seriously when their life-expectancy was so low. Aurelian apparently saw that the answer was to raise the stakes: he would no longer be 'like god' but 'born god', just as his divine protector, with whom he communicated in personal visions, had been raised above the other gods. These ideas were not without echo among those who ruled in the next decade; and they are an important stage in the prehistory of the Christian doctrine of empire forged by Constantine and formulated by Eusebius. But in the meantime the tetrarchy was to make its impermanent attempt to combine a personal relationship with the gods with a bureaucratic type of dynasticism that privileged the office rather than its holder.

Diocletian's idea²⁵ was to split the empire with a second Augustus, assimilating himself to Jupiter and his colleague to Hercules. The Augusti made no claim to personal divinity, though we may doubt whether many of their subjects noticed (e.g. *Pan. Lat.* XI(III).3.7–8). Both were assisted by Caesars, who were adopted as sons, married to daughters of the Augusti, referred to as *Iovius* or *Herculius*, and perhaps, more or less officially, protected by Mars and Sol–Apollo. The raw materials of this system were impeccably Roman. As far as its theological aspects are concerned, Jupiter, Hercules and Mars were central to Rome's *veterrimae religiones* (Aur. Vict. *Caes.* xxxix.45), while Sol was a part of them, albeit much more popular in late antiquity than in earlier periods. Even the idea that particular gods might occupy privileged positions in the official pantheon was by now familiar. Nor did the prominence of the tetrarchy's divine patrons on the coinage mean that its members neglected to honour other divinities when particular circumstances suggested it. At Daphne by Antioch, for example, Diocletian is reported to have built temples for Olympian Zeus and Apollo, but also for Nemesis and Hecate,²⁶ who were both widely worshipped in late antiquity. And when Diocletian fell seriously ill in 304, 'prayers were offered to all the gods for his life' (Lact. *DMP* 17.5).

Diocletian's was not perhaps a very spontaneous piety, but his pronouncements on religious matters were important, forthright and by no means confined to the political sphere. Indeed, he would have seen little profit in distinguishing between religious, political and social aspects of his

²⁴ Artemid. II.49 relates how a man who dreamed he had become Helios was then appointed chief magistrate of his native city.

²⁵ Kolb, *Diocletian* esp. 88–114, 168–72; Desnier (1993).

²⁶ John Malalas, *Chron.* XII.38; and see below, p. 562, on honours for Mithras.

general approach to government, which was conservative but, necessarily in the light of what had gone before, radical. And it is in the context of this, if not wholly innovative, then at least freshly focused politico-theological synthesis, propagated by the tetrarchy,²⁷ that we should assess Diocletian's law limiting consanguineous marriages. Sound morality and piety are here proclaimed the *sine qua non* of Rome's political survival (*Coll.* vi.4). Similarly, his edict of 297 or 302 against the Mesopotamian missionary religion of Mani takes a swipe at the rival empire of the Sassanians, as well as asserting that it is wrong for 'the ancient religion to be censured by some new one, for it is the height of criminality to revise doctrines that were settled and defined once and for all by the ancients, and which still retain and possess their validity and status' (*Coll.* xv.3). The same applied to the Christians, though it was not until 303 that Diocletian, prompted perhaps by the socially disruptive effect of conflicts between groups within the church,²⁸ finally accepted the logic of his own world-view and launched the Great Persecution. But the rapid spread of Mani's teachings, and the slower but surer spread of Christ's, could not be halted by legal violence. Both religions were already sucking the life-blood of polytheism – not just its adherents, but its dialectic, its literature, even some of its metaphysics. In certain polytheist intellectual circles there was already, not only a tradition of anti-Christian polemic, culminating in Porphyry's influential book *Against the Christians*, but also a realization of the need to rethink old attitudes, and even learn from the enemy (see chapter 17*a*). With the collaboration of members of these circles,²⁹ one of the second-generation tetrarchs, Maximinus Daza (Caesar 305–10, Augustus 310–13), now attempted a structural reform of polytheism in the eastern provinces of the empire.³⁰

Daza was one of the most persistent of the persecutors, and a busy patron, according to uniformly hostile sources, of soothsayers and oracles. Not content with building and restoring temples, he invented a new hierarchy, perhaps partly inspired by the organization of the oriental priesthoods and the Christian church. Alongside the unfocused traditional system of part-time, independent priesthoods, and the locally elected provincial high priesthoods responsible for the imperial and other cults, Daza placed a network of centrally appointed priests in every town and area, co-ordinated at the provincial level by a high priest chosen for distinction and administrative skill. This new, more professional hierarchy was charged with two urgent tasks: first to ensure daily sacrifice 'to all their gods' (Lact. *DMP* 36.4), a further intensification of a concern already displayed by Decius and, before him, by Caracalla; and second to harass the Christians, while

²⁷ On possible anticipation by the Severans, see Fishwick (1987–92) 1.1.338–9.

²⁸ Portmann (1990). ²⁹ Eus. *Praep. Evang.* iv.2.10–11; cf. *Hist. Eccl.* ix.11.5–6.

³⁰ Lact. *DMP* 36.4–5; Eus. *Hist. Eccl.* viii.14.8–9; ix.4.2; Eus. *Mart. Pal.* 9.2; Koch (1928) 56–9; Mitchell, 'Maximinus'.

imbuing polytheists with a sense that theirs could be a religion as coherent and organized as its competitor. It is unlikely that these reforms outlasted their inventor, whereas the traditional priesthoods still had decades of life in them; but Julian's even more radical reforms, half a century later, must have been inspired in part by Daza's. Their prospects of success, though, had meanwhile been virtually nullified by the fatal passage of time and, more particularly, by the legacy of the emperor Constantine.

Constantine³¹ marked his break with the tetrarchy by upgrading Sol-Apollo on the coinage, and by claiming or at least allowing it to be believed that he had seen a vision of Apollo (Grannus?) in one of his temples (Grand?) in Gaul (310). This was a return to the more personal, Aurelianic model of relations between the emperor and the divine world. In subsequently publicizing his preference for Christianity, Constantine followed the same model – his choice was represented as having sprung from personal conviction, he established it firmly on an institutional base, and he took care to avoid giving the impression 'that we have detracted excessively from ancient custom' (inscription from Hispellum, 333/335: Gascou (1967)), and to avert open conflict with the Roman religious establishment. The only difference, but a crucial one, was that Sol was assimilable, Christianity was not. So the new religion was practised, increasingly conspicuously, by the emperor himself, but not imposed as the religion of state and people. The erection of cult-statues for the many gods, the consultation of oracles, the performance of sacrifice, perhaps even the mere frequenting of temples was banned if we can believe Eusebius;³² but there was plentiful non-Christian precedent for attacking divination, as also for other of Constantine's anti-polytheist moves – the suppressing of supposedly licentious cults, for example, or the appropriation of temple valuables to finance imperial projects. In any case, as Constantine himself admitted, these laws were the proclamation rather than the enforcement of a policy.³³

An authoritative and fair-minded polytheist source states categorically that Constantine 'made absolutely no alteration in the lawful cult . . . Though poverty reigned in the temples, one could see that all the rest of the ritual was fulfilled' (Lib. *Or.* xxx.6). Cult continued, in a situation of studied anomaly. When he entered Rome in 312, for example, Constantine refused to visit the Capitol and sacrifice;³⁴ yet he remained *Pontifex Maximus*. Sol was not finally dropped from the coinage until 325, and even then was not replaced by specifically Christian imagery. The emperor maintained good relations with the city of Athens, and in 324 guaranteed his new oriental polytheist subjects against molestation; yet

³¹ For the state of the question (especially as regards Constantine's attitude to polytheism) see Barnes, *CE* and (1989) 322–33; Kuhoff (1991); Elliott (1991) 169–70.

³² Eus. *Vit. Const.* II.45.1; IV.23, 25.1; cf. *Origo* 6.34. ³³ Eus. *Vit. Const.* II.60.

³⁴ Fowden (1994) 128–30.

the abruptness with which Constantine acquired the east in 324 perhaps created circumstances less favourable for many polytheists than those that prevailed in the west, where the process of Christianization had been more gradual. Constantine recognized the ultimate inevitability of conflict by moving the capital from Rome to Constantinople; but even there he had himself represented in what might be understood, granted the fluidity of iconographic convention, as polytheist guise, and permitted the temples to remain open.³⁵ In 337 Constantinople will have been as much a polytheist as a Christian city; and still it was more Christian than the rest of the empire.

The long-term implications of Constantine's conversion were not widely understood during his lifetime. To recognize Christianity had been a typically Roman gesture of imperial self-expression in religious affairs. But dealing with bishops on a daily basis forced Constantine and his successors to realize that the church had a tradition and a mind of its own, formed outside, even in conflict with, the state.

II. REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Constantine demonstrated more clearly than any of his predecessors the emperor's power to influence, or at least affect, his subjects' religious behaviour. He did not confine himself to recognizing Christianity's legality – he also undertook to propagate the gospel: in other words, to change his subjects' beliefs and practices. But still the empire could not have been Christianized, had the church not possessed structures capable of transmitting such change to the peripheries. The whole historical conjuncture, and in particular the importance at this time of what was going on at the centre, was exceptional. But the 'grass roots' perspective, from the regions, has its own value, especially in the case of that congeries of religions we call polytheism. And cities were much better placed than emperors to affect the character of religious life at the local level.

In the late fourth century, a polytheist could still feel that, though 'there is no sure evidence for the Greek fable that Mount Olympus is the dwelling-place of the gods, yet we see and feel sure that the market-place of our town is occupied by a crowd of beneficent deities' (Maximus of Madaurus, grammarian, to Augustine, *Aug. Ep.* 16.1). Even official civic cults remained strong well into the third century, and variety was infinite. But the regional study of late Roman polytheism generally – not just specific cults – is in its infancy. We cannot yet generalize about the 'regional perspective' – or, if we do, we are likely either to overemphasize common denominators such as the imperial cult, or to focus on what is most peculiar to local perspectives,

³⁵ Dagron, *Naissance* 37–8, 374–5; Fowden (1991).

namely the relatively un-Romanized, 'ethnic' religions. The true situation was much more complex, and will perhaps always defy generalization.

The significance even of well-known gods varied widely from place to place. Roma, the emperor, the Capitoline Triad and the 'Twelve Gods' (the classic Olympians) were revered throughout the empire, but in a way that varied according to the degree of their assimilation to local tradition, and of the natives' zeal for Rome. Nor, even in late antiquity, were Greek and Roman polytheism by any means the same thing. Such ancient institutions as the Eleusinian cult and the Panathenaic festival, or the Arval Brethren and the Vestal Virgins, continued to provide points of reference for traditionalists; while the influence exercised by these two related cultures, both mutually and on third parties, was decidedly unequal. Greece had given Rome much more than Rome had given Greece: even the emperor-cult had hellenistic antecedents. As far as other traditions were concerned, the Greeks had been interacting with them much longer than had the Romans. The influence of the barbarian gods was no less unpredictable. They might at home be regarded as universal, but not elsewhere – such were the African Saturn, Thoth of Hermopolis in Egypt, and Elagabalus of Emesa. Cybele's immigration to and official acceptance by Rome during the wars with Hannibal was an example that proved difficult to follow. Isis, despite her enormous popularity, was not always officially approved – though that of course is an argument for not taking the official/unofficial distinction too seriously. Harpocrates, who was deeply revered by ordinary Egyptians, had nothing like the fortune of Isis and Serapis abroad.³⁶ Jupiter Dolichenus and Mithras were widely worshipped, especially in the culturally influential milieu of the army, and at Carnuntum there is a dedication by the tetrarchs to Mithras as 'patron of his empire' (*ILS* 659); but neither of these gods ever became official. Elagabalus did, for a space, become official in Rome – but was rejected virtually everywhere else. Of the African gods, Dea Caelestis was successful outside Africa, but not her consort Saturn.

In short, specimen regional perspectives on late polytheism can be presented; but, beyond their intrinsic interest, there can be no assertion of their typicality until the whole 'landscape with figures' is assembled. One suspects, in fact, that everyday religion was always of a strongly local tinge, and that 'typicality', unless understood in broadly structural terms, is a chimera. Where earlier generations of scholars sought evidence for 'personal' piety, attention is now increasingly, and with justifiably greater sensitivity to epigraphical than to literary evidence, focused on local religion, not forgetting the scope for individual pieties within that amalgam, or indeed the difficulty subjects of the later Roman empire would have

³⁶ Dunand (1979) 134–6.

experienced, if asked to distinguish 'indigenous' from 'Roman' with the clarity many scholars still expect.³⁷

Tripolitania and Trier (with its environs) illustrate well the variety of the regional perspective. Both were deeply marked by the period from Severus to Constantine, Tripolitania because it bred Severus, and Trier as an imperial residence from the tetrarchy onwards.

I. Tripolitania

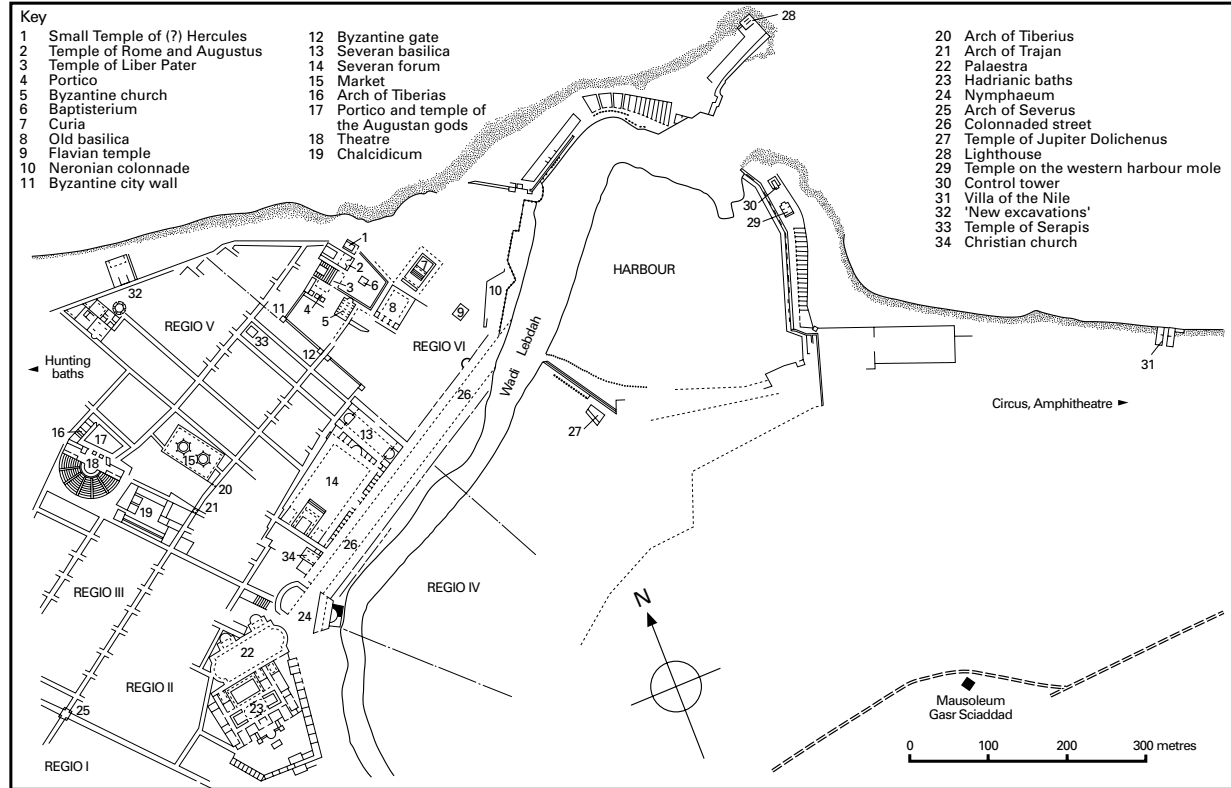
Tripolitania's three eponymous coastal cities, Sabratha, Oea and Lepcis Magna, were termini of trans-Saharan trade-routes and markets for grain and oil abundantly produced in their hinterland. They enjoyed close links with Carthage and Italy, and lay on the important if perilous North African coastal route between Carthage and Alexandria. Their already enviable prosperity was further boosted by the awesome building programme initiated by Septimius Severus in his native Lepcis, and completed by Caracalla. The excavations of Lepcis enable us to reconstruct to an extent impossible elsewhere the cultic topography of a Severan city (Map 9). There is comparative material from the excavations of Sabratha; and additional details are supplied by Oea, mostly inaccessible beneath modern Tripoli.³⁸

The historic centre of Lepcis was the old forum, whose shrines offer a first orientation in Tripolitanian religion. Along the northwest side stood temples of Liber Pater, Rome and Augustus, and (?)Hercules, early imperial structures restored and embellished, as usual in Tripolitania, during the second century. The divinities honoured lead us straight to the heart of matters in this basically Libyan and Punic society, with a few Greek and many Roman admixtures, where Latin was the language of officialdom and the educated, but Punic was still commonly spoken (albeit inscribed, by the third century, only in the countryside). For Liber Pater and Hercules were identified with the Punic gods Shadrappa and Milk'ashtart, brought by the old Phoenician traders, but now Romanized in more than just name and housed in classical temples, a powerful factor in the continued vigour of the conqueror's religion.³⁹ They were the special patrons of Lepcis, where they are also to be seen on the arch of Severus, who first demonstrated among men what they had already shown among gods, that the conquered provincial could take the conquering Roman captive. At Sabratha, the cults of both divinities are attested at least into the 340s.⁴⁰ The mysteries of Liber

³⁷ For sensitive approaches to particular cities see Millar, *Near East* 304–08 (Emesa); Scheid (1995) (Trier).

³⁸ General works on Tripolitania: Haynes (1981); di Vita (1982); Mattingly (1995). Lepcis: Squarciapino (1966). Sabratha: Kenrick (1986). Religion: *IRT* esp. Index VII(a), 'Gods and goddesses'; Bénabou (1976) 259–380; Brouquier-Reddé (1992).

³⁹ Lipiński (1993). ⁴⁰ *IRT* 7, 55, 104.



(Bacchus/ Dionysus) were also widely popular,⁴¹ as elsewhere in the empire. One notes though that the shrines of Liber and Hercules in the old forum at Lepcis merely flank a larger sanctuary, that of Rome and Augustus, adorned both within and without by a splendid collection of imperial statuary. And though Severus put his *di patrii* on the Roman coinage, and built them a temple in the capital, the new forum he gave his native city contains only one temple, apparently for the Gens Septimia. The native gods are there too – lurking in the decorative sculptures. There was to be no doubting the supremacy of the imperial power, or the integrative role of Roman in relation to native cults.⁴²

Continuing these public themes, the southwest side of Lepcis' old forum displayed a shrine of the emperor Antoninus Pius(?); in the middle stood the capitolium, perhaps;⁴³ and then a first-century temple of Cybele, whom Rome had long since forgiven her alien origins and accorded official favour. It is probably with this temple that we should associate a scattering of carvings and inscriptions sometimes identified as Mithraic; for Tripolitania was unreceptive to Mithras, in this recalling rather the Greek east than the Latin west.⁴⁴ There may though have been a temple of Isis. Even without her, Cybele and Liber–Dionysus will have ensured that the forum was a lively as well as a dignified place. Apart from frequent ceremonies and processions, one might also witness there dramatic recitations of stories about the gods, or hear some visiting rhetor speak on a religious subject, as when Apuleius delivered a well-attended encomium of Asclepius at Oea.⁴⁵ There were too 'the much-despised diviners of the market-place' (Artemid. I. *pr.*), the dream-interpreters, and magicians boastfully whipping up a clientele.⁴⁶ The gods looked out from their temples on this and much more.

Few public spaces were unadorned by some sort of shrine. The traveller who arrived by sea disembarked by the harbour-side temple of Jupiter Dolichenus, a Syrian deity especially favoured by soldiers and, like most of the oriental gods, never more popular than under the Severans. Also near the shore stood a temple for Neptune, such as was to make Augustine sarcastically enquire why one should pray to Neptune by the sea, when the salt waves themselves are more likely to lend ear than a lifeless statue.⁴⁷ The Chalcidicum, apparently a commercial complex, was graced by a shrine to the Numen Augusti and possibly Venus, mother of the Gens Iulia. In the same place a statue had been dedicated for the recovery of Antoninus Pius. In the Hadrianic baths, marble gods mixed with the crowd: mostly Olympians, though one might encounter Isis too, while Asclepius was

⁴¹ Apul. *Apol.* 55. ⁴² Cf. Février (1976). ⁴³ Barton (1982) 291–2.

⁴⁴ *CIMRM* 1.87–9; 11.17–18; Daniels (1975) 271–2.

⁴⁵ Apul. *Apol.* 55; Aug. *Civ. Dei* 11.4, *Ep.* 91.5.

⁴⁶ Cf. Alciph. 111.23; Polemon, *Phgn.*, ed. Forster (Leipzig, 1893) 163.

⁴⁷ Aug. *Sermon* 26, ed. Dolbeau (*Contra Paganos*) ch. 18 (Dolbeau (1992) 104–5).

honoured by at least five statues thanks to his identification with the Punic healing god Eshmun, as well as to the more general vogue he enjoyed in his own right. Likewise in the Severan forum and basilica, Graeco-Roman mingled with local and oriental gods – Isis, Serapis, Asclepius and Battling Giants as well as Hercules and Liber Pater adorn the temple, the famous arcade medallions (whether of Medusa or some other horror is disputed) were there no doubt to ward off evil spirits, while the pilasters that framed the basilica's apses depicted the Labours of Hercules and the revelry of Bacchus (Liber Pater). Artemis of Ephesus had a shrine in the amphitheatre.

But of all public buildings other than temples, theatres were the most closely associated with religious ritual, for (as a Christian writer put it) 'the path to the theatre is from the temples and the altars, from that wretchedness of incense and blood, to the tune of pipes and trumpets; and the masters of the ceremonies are those two all-polluted adjuncts of funeral and sacrifice, the undertaker and the soothsayer' (Tert. *de Spect.* 10). As was widely customary in the Roman world, the Lepcis theatre's central axis was marked by an altar in the orchestra and a temple atop the cavea, respectively dedicated, in this instance, to [Liber?] Augustus and Ceres Augusta, the harvest's all-important patroness. Religious and other statues stood at many points of the building; and outside, in the theatre square, was a temple of the Di Augusti. Lepcis' devotion to the imperial cult, and wish to invoke the protection of the gods for its rulers, was everywhere affirmed.⁴⁸

Non-relation to public space might also be significant. The temple of Serapis is just another building opening off a central street; and its inscriptions are all Greek, two of them recording how Serapis appeared in a dream to a sick man, and cured him. No doubt this is where the Alexandrian community gathered, and cultivated its own identity, just as it reserved special places in the amphitheatre. Sabratha's temple of Serapis and Isis also stands apart, tolerated rather than officially recognized, at the town's eastern end,⁴⁹ though its proximity to the sea was appropriate to the 'mistress of sea-faring' (*I. Cyme* 41.49) and convenient for the *Isidis Navigium*, which each spring marked the reopening of the sea to shipping. Maybe this part of Sabratha was favoured by mariners and aliens, who along with slaves seem to have supplied most of the west's Isiacs.⁵⁰ The use of Greek indicates that the cult of the Egyptian gods was not fully acclimatized, and is paralleled, if on a lesser scale, in the Asclepius cult, both at Lepcis and elsewhere in the Latin-speaking parts of the empire.⁵¹ Another Egyptian god, Jupiter (originally Zeus) (H)Ammon of Siwa, was widely popular in

⁴⁸ Fishwick (1987–92) 1.2.446–54.

⁴⁹ Wild (1984) 1817–18; and cf. 1818–19: the 'temple of Serapis' on the forum is a hypothetical identification.

⁵⁰ MacMullen (1987) 182–5 esp. n. 494.

⁵¹ *Bull. Ép.* (1980) 335–6.

rural Tripolitania, but not in the coastal cities. With Africa's *deus magnus*, Baal Hammon–Saturn, surely and explicitly attested only on an inscribed marble basin from Sabratha,⁵² Tripolitania seems a distinctly transitional zone, its innocence of Saturn paralleled by the absence of Cyrenaica's Greek gods.

After the 230s there was little temple-building in the three cities; but Tripolitanian polytheism survived in all its variety into the fourth century.⁵³ Earthquakes, nomad invasions and failure to effect repairs were probably more significant than Christianity as causes of the ruin that overcame many temples in the coastal cities during the latter part of the century. Inland, where there were no large cities, Christianity was to make even less impact than had Romanization. The rural cults of Tripolitania⁵⁴ all show strong Libyan and Punic traits. In the third-century camp at Bu Njem, for example, the official military cults were practised, but also that of the local genius; while in the temples belonging to the adjacent civilian settlement we encounter one Vanammon, otherwise unknown, alongside Mars Canaphar and Jupiter (H)Ammon, the latter widely revered by soldiers and other travellers along the desert highways of the frontier zone. The cult-centre of (H)Ammon's bull-headed progeny, Gurzil, may well have been at Ghirza, where a late antique temple recently excavated turned out to be strongly native in style, despite certain influences from the Mediterranean world. Ghirza seems to have remained a centre of polytheist devotion until the mid-sixth century.

2. Trier

Like Lepcis, Oea and Sabratha, Trier was near but not of the *limes*, and acquired imperial connections during our period. But it is the differences between Tripolitania and the Trier region that are more striking, especially Trier's populous countryside, whose religious life is well known to us not just because of the intenser efforts of archaeologists, but because Romano-Celtic religion was anyway strongly rural in emphasis, much attached to sacred trees and springs. Even in Trier itself, this as much as official Roman prejudice or the relative archaeological inaccessibility of the city centre is likely to be the reason why the more important known shrines are on the urban fringe.⁵⁵

One of these is the temple of Mars, in a wooded valley just across the Mosel from Trier. Mars, Mercury and Apollo were the most widely revered

⁵² But see also Squarciapino (1991–2). ⁵³ Aug. *Epp.* 46–7; Brouquier-Reddé (1992) 215–16.

⁵⁴ Brogan and Smith (1984); Rebuffat (1990); Brouquier-Reddé (1992); Mattingly (1995) 38–9, 168, 209–13.

⁵⁵ Wightman (1970) esp. 208–49 and (1986); Heinen (1985) 178–200, 402–5; Merten (1985); Binsfeld *et al.* (1988); Scheid (1992) and (1995).

gods in northeastern Gaul, and their 'surnames' often make clear their native origin. At Trier, Mars was revered mainly as 'Lenus' and 'Iovantucarus', in a splendid second-century temple that combined native and classical elements. Here too were worshipped the Xulsigiae, spring-nymphs perhaps, who fed nearby healing-baths for pilgrims. One approached the temple up a steep road from the river, flanked as it neared the precincts by altars and exedras. Some of these were set up by tribal deputations on official visits to what was evidently a shrine of some political importance, a meeting-place for the community as a whole. First one paid one's respects to the god – there are charming votive statuettes of children carrying birds. Then one might visit the baths, or the theatre designed for ritual performances, declamation and so on – a common feature of sanctuaries both in this part of Gaul, and in other areas of the empire, such as Syria.⁵⁶ The priests were men of high social standing, the sort of people whom Rome everywhere sought to enmesh in subtle treason through official patronage of such ancestral rituals as had survived the initial conquest and the weeding out of unacceptable cults that had, in many parts of the empire, ensued. Celtic cults in Gaul, like Punic cults in Africa, were gradually assimilated to their Roman counterparts. Celtic and Punic gods, once aniconic, began to be depicted in statues. Romanitas seeped thus into the subconscious even of the unprivileged – to the confusion of scholars, who still debate whether Mars' role as healer, firmly attested in this region, is to be attributed to his Celtic or his Roman aspect.⁵⁷

These ambiguities pervaded Treveran religion. A dedication to Asclepius made by an alien and another to Mars Victor Augustus, seem clearly Graeco-Roman; and the houses of the wealthy sported mosaics and frescoes with mythological or literary themes, which might be of more than aesthetic significance.⁵⁸ But Jupiter Optimus Maximus, to whom an inscription attributes a temple, may well be a native weather god. Trier will certainly have possessed temples of classical design, for the Capitoline triad, for example, and the emperor; but the only undisputed example found so far is the magnificent second-century building, its dedication unknown, that stood in the southeastern corner of the city, on the commanding site called Am Herrenbrünnchen. In the Altbach valley below, in striking contrast, lay a gaggle of over fifty shrines of native type, a square, polygonal or circular cella surrounded in most cases by the characteristic verandah. Some of the gods worshipped in this, the largest cultic area discovered north of the Alps, were either Roman, or more-or-less Romanized – the Gallo-Roman Jupiter, for example, depicted as so often in this part of

⁵⁶ MacMullen (1987) 39–42.

⁵⁷ On the ambiguities of Ares, see also Mitchell, *Anatolia* II, 28. On the remarkable vigour of local cults, especially in the west and from the mid-second to mid-third centuries, see Alföldy (1989) 78–82.

⁵⁸ Simon (1986); Heinen (1985) 359–62 (the later fourth-century Leda mosaic).

Gaul as a rider-god atop a column; and a Mercury who boasted a fine bronze statuette of wholly classical type. But the majority were mother goddesses, water divinities and other rustics who would not have been at ease in the city centre. No doubt they ended up in this green valley, eventually included within the later second- or earlier third-century walls, by a mixture of pressure and preference. There were also what seem to have been priests' houses, and near the precinct's entrance a cultic theatre, abandoned though in the second century, and replaced by a house which in the third century came to accommodate a Mithraeum. The Altbachtal, which reached its highest point of development in the third century, kept going until the time of Gratian, a marketplace of gods, and a symbol of polytheism's anti-exclusivism and convenient imprecision. For to worship 'all the gods', as the Apolline oracles of Didyma and Claros commanded,⁵⁹ allowed room both for those sophisticated minds who felt that through the many they worshipped the One,⁶⁰ and for the simpler majority, who continued to believe in the gods' individuality, and the homely merits of shopping around. The Tripolitanian who addressed a prayer to an image that represented at once Liber, Amor and Apollo (*IRT* 299), may stand for the infinite shades of syncretism that lay in between.

The roads by which one left Trier, or any other town, were lined with tombs, and the traveller might observe the rites of the dead and ponder their pathetic inscriptions. Some of the tombs were theologically instructive: a splendid third-century specimen at Igel near Trier depicts the passage of the soul to the next world, as well as the intricacies of its owner's cloth-business here below. Once in the countryside, one found shrines (with which fairs were often associated) near tribal boundaries, in villages, next to villas, and in association with hill-tops, springs or sacred trees and groves. One left one's offering – usually a coin – by the entrance to the cella, and passed on. A big and prosperous villa, or even a smaller one on a main road, might contain something more exotic – a Mithraeum, perhaps, though on the whole the Trier region was slower to learn about oriental religions than, say, Mainz on the Rhine *limes*, with its floating military population. And there were occasional larger shrines that attracted pilgrims and the sick, as at Hochscheid, on a well-watered, wooded hill south of the Trier–Bingen road.⁶¹ Here a Romano-Celtic temple with fine statues of Apollo (Grannus) and his consort Sirona stood over a spring where worshippers came and drank, leaving an offering. The spring also fed a bath-house used by pilgrims, who could stay in an adjacent hostel, though there is no suggestion of incubation.

⁵⁹ See above, p. 528 n. 16.

⁶⁰ *IME* 165; Aug. *Ep.* 16.4 and *Civ. Dei* IV.II.

⁶¹ Weisgerber (1975).

Hochscheid fell out of use in the later third century, a time of unrest hereabout, and was destroyed by Christians during the fourth. But many rural sanctuaries continued in use through the fourth century. As for Trier itself, the studious neutrality in religious matters of the polytheist panegyrist who spoke there before Constantine in 313 (*Pan. Lat.* XII(IX)) was probably a response to what was known or guessed about the emperor's changing views; but the local situation remained undecided and transitional for much longer, probably at least until the end of the fourth century.⁶²

III. CONCLUSION

The 'grass roots' perspective, leaning heavily on archaeology, helps us towards a detailed view of polytheism as a set of social acts, but tells us less about the beliefs those acts reflected.

Cultic activity, which is attested throughout our period, is rightly taken as proof that the public polytheism of the cities, at least, was still maintained. But such activity should be seen, not just as a continuation of the way things had been in (say) the second century, but also as a stage on the way to the fourth century. And in the fourth century, civic cult was offered to Christian emperors, who called themselves *Pontifex Maximus*, just as lesser Christian notables held priesthoods in their local civic temples. The persistence of civic cult proves, in other words, the liveliness of the cities, but not necessarily the vigour of their gods. And it is instructive to compare the structure of the civic cults with that of the empire and the Christian church. Reacting to external pressure on the frontiers, growing local particularism after long periods of rule from Rome, and the army's tendency to usurp and fragment imperial authority, Diocletian decentralized important aspects of the exercise of power at the top, but within a firmly collegial framework. The church's formula, whereby locally powerful bishops met periodically in synod, was a similarly flexible approach to the problem of how to establish, then maintain, institutional and doctrinal coherence over a vast geographical area. But in this hierarchical as well as corporate world, polytheism remained obstinately cellular, tied to its inborn sense of place, and to the individuals or groups who inhabited those places.

We should not of course assume that polytheism's attachment to place, its localism, was an unqualified disadvantage. Seen in certain lights, its diversity was a source of strength, and anyway can hardly have bothered very much the peasant who never left his village, and knew – but knew well – only a few gods. But on the more cosmopolitan it imposed an embarrassingly wide choice, and constant anxiety that one might be neglecting some god who would exact revenge (Constantine, *Oratio ad Sanctos* (ed. Heikel) III.3;

⁶² Brink (1997).

Aug. *Civ. Dei* iv.11). This is why polytheists' 'religious experience' was so unlike that of Christians. It was not an approach to a given idea of the transcendent, expressed as God, Christ or the Virgin Mother. Instead it was the unpredictable experience of 'at last understanding' the power and significance or even the very identity of, and hence one's own obligations towards, a particular god who had perhaps hitherto hovered at the edge of one's consciousness, or even been 'unknown' (*agnōstos*).⁶³ The attainment of such understanding could be a striking experience – one thinks of Lucius' vision of Isis at the beginning of the last book of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, the anonymous traveller's vision of Mandulis at Kalabsha (see chapter 17b, p. 548), or this dedicatory inscription attached to a statue of Cybele–Caelestis at Carvoran in Britain:

The Virgin in her heavenly place rides upon the Lion; bearer of corn, inventor of law, founder of cities, by whose gifts it is Man's good lot to know the gods [*nosse . . . deos*]: therefore she is the Mother of the Gods, Peace, Virtue, Ceres, the Syrian Goddess, weighing life and laws in her balance. Syria has sent the constellation seen in the heavens to Libya to be worshipped: thence have we all learned. Thus has understood, led by thy godhead [*ita intellexit numine inductus tuo*], Marcus Caecilius Donatianus, serving as tribune in the post of prefect by the emperor's gift.

(*RIB* 1791, second or early third century; cf. Stephens (1984))

Happy experiences such as these were the punctuation in a wider anxiety. But the growing frequency of dedications 'to all the gods' at least gave vent to this anxiety, and also served to express a catholicism inherent in traditional polytheism. Monotheism, admittedly, had both logical and practical advantages; so too did the revelations on which it rested. Hence not only the spread of monotheist tendencies within polytheism itself, but also the growing interest of third-century polytheists in Judaism, the only traditional and therefore respectable religion that taught a single God. And of course this interest gradually spread to Christianity too – an upstart religion, but free of Judaism's narrowly ethnic character. In Asia Minor, epigraphy illustrates the emergence, even in remote and rural places, of milieux whose devotion to a 'highest god' seems to have been built on common ground shared by polytheism, Judaism and Christianity.⁶⁴ And the experience of 'at last understanding' might of course lead one, not to another of the gods of polytheism, but to the one God of Christianity.⁶⁵ We should not, though, be tempted to go further than this and assume that the politico-social crisis of the third century was in itself bound to be lethal to polytheism, which had survived equally acute problems in the past. After all, polytheism did

⁶³ For such uncertainties, see Paus. 1.1.4; v.14.8; x.4.4; Eus. *Vit. Const.* 1.28.1; Robert (1980) 399. For a different interpretation see Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* 34.

⁶⁴ Mitchell, *Anatolia* 11.31–51. ⁶⁵ E.g. Eus. *Vit. Const.* 1.32.3.

not claim to explain everything. It presented, if we except the philosophers, no grand programme of ultimate truths; and that which was not asserted could hardly be invalidated. Polytheism did claim to be able to handle divine *dynamis*; but the problems of doing that were neither more nor less tractable in the third century than they had been earlier. The difference between the third century A.D. and, say, the chaos of hellenistic times was that there was now a serious alternative religion. But Christianity triumphed more because of what it offered than because of what polytheism lacked. The proof is that, at least until Augustine and the aftermath of Rome's fall in 410, Christian apologists themselves attacked polytheism rather for what they considered to be its failure to depict and worship God worthily than for having failed to meet its own goals or been sapped by inner crisis. The increasing numbers of men and women who abandoned polytheism did so not, in this period at least, because the religion that was their birth-right had become unviable, but because of a hard-nosed calculation of Christianity's superior effectiveness and responsiveness to their needs. The political élite, in particular, was coming to feel that what aspired to be a single and universal empire ought to worship a single and universal god.⁶⁶

No less attractive than Christianity's monotheism was the example of love and compassion that Christ offered for imitation, another element hard to find in non-philosophical polytheism – though it was much esteemed when offered, for instance in the cult of the *philanthrōpotatos* Asclepius. As an autocrat and a man of passionate faith, Constantine was deeply attracted. And what the emperor wanted counted, by now, for a lot in matters of religion. But at the first Christian emperor's death, and for decades to come, the many gods could still be plausibly represented as Rome's natural defenders.

⁶⁶ Fowden (1993a).

CHRONOLOGY

Emperors	The West	The East	Culture, Religion, Society
192 Death of Commodus (31 December). Pertinax proclaimed emperor			
193 Murder of Pertinax (28 March). Julianus declared emperor, but put to death on 1 June. Accession of Septimius Severus	193 Severus declares D. Clodius Albinus, governor of Britain, Caesar	193 C. Pescennius Niger proclaimed emperor by the Syrian legions	
		194 Niger is defeated on the plain of Issus (April). Severus crosses the Euphrates (c. September)	
	195 Albinus declared emperor in Britain. He sets up his capital in Lyon		
	197 Severus defeats Albinus near Lyon (19 February). Death of Albinus. Severus returns to Rome (June)	197–202 Severus campaigns in the east	197 Tertullian's <i>Apologeticum</i>
198 Caracalla (Caesar 196) proclaimed Augustus		198 Capture of Ctesiphon 199–201 Severus in Egypt	before 198 Papinian's <i>Quaestiones</i>
	202 Severus returns to Rome from the east and celebrates his <i>decennalia</i>		202 Enforcement of regulations against Christians
	203 Consulship of C. Fulvius Plautianus and P. Septimius Geta. The lawyer Papinian is praetorian prefect		203 Dedication of the arch of Septimius at Rome. Origen succeeds Clement as head of the Catechetical School. The <i>Passio</i> of Perpetua and Felicitas
	203–4 Severus in Africa		after 204 Papinian's <i>Responsa</i>
	204 Secular games at Rome		205 Birth of Plotinus
	205 Consulship of Caracalla and Geta. Murder of Plautianus		

- 206 First consulship of Cassius Dio
206–7 Bulla Felix active in Italy
208 Severus leaves Rome for Britain
- 209 Geta (Caesar 198) proclaimed Augustus
- 211 Death of Severus in York (4 February). Succeeded by Caracalla and Geta. Following the murder of Geta, Caracalla becomes sole emperor (26 December)
- 211 Murder of Papinian, possibly on the same day as Geta
- 213 Caracalla campaigns successfully against the Alamanni
- 214–17 Caracalla in the east, accompanied by his mother. He invades Parthia in 215, spends the winter of 215–16 at Antioch, then advances to the eastern borders of Adiabene
- 215 Massacre at Alexandria
- 217 Asassination of Caracalla near Carrhae (8 April). Macrinus becomes emperor, but is defeated in battle by supporters of Elagabalus and put to death (8 June 218)
- 217 Macrinus begins a campaign against the Parthians
- 218 Ardashir becomes king of Persia
208–213 Parthian succession disputed between Vologaes V and Artabanus V. Artabanus is eventually confirmed as king of Parthia
- 212 Caracalla issues the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, universalizing Roman citizenship
- 215 Issue of *Antoninianus* silver coinage

(cont.)

Emperors	The West	The East	Culture, Religion, Society
218 Elagabalus proclaimed emperor at Raphanea (16 May)		218 Macrinus agrees a dishonourable peace with Artabanus V (summer) 218–19 Elagabalus winters at Nicomedia	
	219 Elagabalus arrives in Rome (late summer) 220 Consulship of Elagabalus and Comazon		after 219 Cassius Dio completes his <i>History</i>
221 Elagabalus adopts his cousin, Alexianus, as Caesar, under the name of Marcus Aurelius Alexander (26 June)			
222 Elagabalus and his mother are murdered (13 March). His cousin succeeds him, taking the name of Severus Alexander	222 The lawyer Ulpian is <i>praefectus annonae</i> , and subsequently praetorian prefect 223 Murder of Ulpian		
		224 Artabanus V defeated and killed in battle by Ardashir	224 Philostratus' <i>Lives of the Sophists</i> c. 225 Death of Tertullian c. 225–30 The Ludovisi battle-sarcophagus
		226 Ardashir crowned king of kings of Iran	
	229 Second consulship of Cassius Dio	230 Persians under Ardashir invade Mesopotamia. Nisibis besieged	
	231 Severus Alexander departs Rome for the east (spring)		
		232 Severus Alexander campaigns unsuccessfully against Ardashir	232 Origen is exiled from Alexandria, and moves to Caesarea c. 232 Birth of Porphyry

- 234 Maximinus Thrax proclaimed emperor by Pannonian soldiers
- 235 Death of Severus Alexander and his mother, Julia Mamaea, near Mainz, after a mutiny (18/19 March). Maximinus Thrax confirmed as emperor by the senate
- 236 Maximinus declares his son, Maximus, Caesar and deifies his own wife
- 238 Gordian I and his son, Gordian II, declared emperors in Africa. Their claim is recognized by the senate, but they are defeated and killed near Carthage by the legate of Numidia. The senate elects Pupienus and Balbinus emperors (late April/early May). Upon their murder by the praetorians, Gordian III is proclaimed emperor (August)
- 235 Maximinus campaigns successfully against the Alamanni
- 236–7 Campaigns against the Sarmatians and Dacians
- 238 Maximinus besieges Aquileia. He is murdered, along with his son (early June). The Goths and Dacian Carpi attack across the Danube
- 238–41 M. Tullius Menophilus governor of Moesia Inferior. He negotiates successfully with the Goths and Carpi (240)
- 240 Rebellion at Carthage under Sabinianus crushed
- 241 Timesitheus appointed praetorian prefect
- 235–8 The Persians overrun Mesopotamia
- 236 Capture of Nisibis and Carrhae
- c. 240–5 The Achilles sarcophagus
- 241 Shapur I succeeds his father Ardashir on the Persian throne. He launches an offensive upon Mesopotamia
- 242 A campaign against the Persians is inaugurated, under Timesitheus and Gordian (spring). Gordian winters in Antioch
- 242 Mani begins preaching his new religion

(cont.)

Emperors	The West	The East	Culture, Religion, Society
		243 Roman successes against the Persians. Timesitheus falls ill and dies	
244 Philip the Arabian acknowledged as emperor (early March)	244–6 and 248–53 Goths, Carpi and their allies invade Moesia and the Balkans	244 Shapur I defeats Romans. Gordian III dies, possibly of wounds. His successor, Philip the Arabian, makes peace with the Persians and departs for Rome	
247 Philip, the emperor's son (Caesar 244) is declared Augustus (August)			247–8 Dionysius bishop of Alexandria
	248 Millenary celebrations at Rome (21 April). Decius pacifies Moesia and Pannonia		248 Origen's <i>Contra Celsum</i> . Cyprian becomes bishop of Carthage
249 Trajanus Decius is declared emperor by his troops (June)	249 Philip is killed in battle with Decius near Verona (September)	249 Usurpation of Jotapian in Syria and/or Cappadocia	late 249 Persecution of Christians
	250 Etruscus campaigns against the Goths in Illyricum	250 Attempted usurpation of Titus Julius Priscus	c. 250 Birth of Iamblichus
	250 or 251 Usurpation of Valens at Rome		
251 Decius names his two sons, Herennius Etruscus and Hostilianus (Caesars 250) Augusti (May). Hostilianus proclaimed emperor with Trebonianus Gallus (May/June). Hostilianus dies soon afterwards. Gallus' son, Volusianus, proclaimed Augustus	251 Defeat and death of Decius and Herennius Etruscus on the Danube at the hands of the Goths under Cniva (May)		mid-third century: sporadic recurrence of plague throughout the empire
	252 Goths and others invade the Danubian provinces	252 Tiridates III is deposed by the Persians in Armenia. Under Shapur, they then attack Mesopotamia	c. 254 Death of Origen

253 Aemilianus is proclaimed emperor on the Danube, but is murdered some four months later by his troops near Spoletium. In the meantime, Valerian is proclaimed emperor by the Rhine legions. The senate recognize his claim, and make his son, Gallienus, Augustus

254 Marcommani in Pannonia. They raid Ravenna. Alamanni in Raetia and Gaul. Gallienus marches against them

256 Gallienus in Cologne. He establishes a mint

258 Death of Valerian II on campaign in Illyricum. The usurpation of Ingenuus in Moesia and Pannonia is crushed by Gallienus

259 Alamanni invade Illyricum and Gaul, and Iuthungi invade Italy

253 First Gothic sea-borne expedition to Asia Minor. Shapur invades Syria, capturing Doura and Antioch. Usurpation of Uranius Antoninus, who repulses the Persians

254 Shapur captures Nisibis. Goths in Thrace. Valerian departs for the east, liberates Antioch and recaptures Doura. Usurpation of Uranius Antoninus ends

255 The Borani take Pityus and Trapezus. Valerian reaches Antioch. Second Gothic sea-borne expedition to Asia Minor

258 Odenathus of Palmyra receives consular honours

257 Renewed persecution of Christians. Cyprian of Carthage exiled to Curubis

258 Martyrdoms of Cyprian and Sixtus II, bishop of Rome

259 Dionysius I, bishop of Rome

(*cont.*)

Emperors	The West	The East	Culture, Religion, Society
260 Macrianus and Quietus declared emperors	260 The Alamanni are repulsed by Gallienus, who then opens a mint at Milan. Simplicinius Genialis, governor of Raetia, is victorious over the Iuthungi. Usurpations of Postumus in Gaul, and of Regalianus on the Danube 260–7 Gallienus campaigning in Illyricum, with only brief returns to Rome	260 Valerian is defeated at Edessa by Shapur and captured. The Persians make further inroads into the eastern provinces	260 Gallienus ends persecution of the Christians (The 'Little Peace')
261 Macrianus killed in battle against Aureolus in Illyricum. Quietus executed at Emesa by Odenathus (November)		261 Odenathus of Palmyra recognised as <i>dux</i> and <i>corrector totius Orientis</i> . Usurpation of Valens in Macedonia. He is later killed by his own troops. Usurpation of Mussius Aemilianus, prefect of Egypt, ended the following year	
	262 Gallienus in Rome (briefly) to celebrate his <i>decennalia</i> (summer)	262 Odenathus successful against the Persians. He attempts to capture Ctesiphon. Goths in Asia Minor	262 Plague reaches Italy and Africa. Dedication of the arch of Gallienus at Rome
	264 Postumus celebrates his <i>quinquennalia</i> in Gaul (July?)		
	265 Gallienus campaigns unsuccessfully against Postumus	266 Odenathus makes a second attempt upon Ctesiphon. Goths make another maritime raid on Asia Minor 266 or 267 Arrest and execution of Odenathus. His wife, Zenobia, secures power in the name of their infant son, Vaballathus	265 or 266 Gallienus is initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries at Athens

267 *Quindecennalia* of Gallienus

268 Murder of Gallienus at the siege of Milan (September). He is succeeded by Claudius II, who puts down the revolt of Aureolus

270 Claudius II dies at Sirmium, a victim of the plague (January). The senate choose his brother, Quintillus, as emperor, but he reigns only 77 days. Aurelian declares himself in Sirmium

267 Gallienus victorious in battle at Naïssus. Aureolus throws in his lot with Postumus, and is attacked at Milan by Gallienus

268 Alamanni invade northern Italy, but are defeated by Claudius II

269 Claudius is victorious over the Goths at Naïssus, and receives the title *Gothicus Maximus*. Postumus celebrates his *decennalia*, but is assassinated shortly afterwards (May or June). He is succeeded first by Marius, then by Victorinus

271 Victorinus takes Autun. Aurelian campaigns against the Iuthungi in Raetia and Noricum, the Vandals and Sarmatians in Pannonia. New incursions into Italy by the Alamanni and Iuthungi. Aurelian's victories at Fano and Ticinum deliver Italy. Assassination of Victorinus at Cologne. Tetricus is declared emperor in Gaul. Evacuation of Dacia and creation of a new province, Dacia Ripensis

267 Gothic invasion of Greece, the Balkans and the Aegean. Sack of Athens

268 Goths attack Macedonia

269 Zenobia extends her kingdom

270 Palmyrene troops enter Alexandria. Zenobia annexes Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor

271 Vaballathus, the son of Zenobia, is declared Augustus

268 Paul of Samosata is declared a heretic by a synod at Antioch

270 Death of Plotinus

271 Construction of a new defensive wall around Rome begun

(cont.)

Emperors	The West	The East	Culture, Religion, Society
	272 or 273 Tetricus elevates his son Tetricus	272 Aurelian moves against the Palmyrenes. He reconquers Asia Minor and Egypt. He is victorious in Syria, at Daphne and Emessa. Zenobia is captured. Death of Shapur I, who is succeeded by Hormizd I	
	274 Aurelian campaigns in Gaul. Tetricus submits. Aurelian celebrates a triumph at Rome	273 Revolt of Palmyra is ruthlessly suppressed. Hormizd I dies, and is succeeded by Vahran I	274 Inauguration of Aurelian's temple of the Sun God and creation of a priesthood to administer it. Coinage reform
275 Murder of Aurelian (late September/early October). After a brief interregnum, Tacitus is declared emperor by the senate, with the support of the army (late November/early December)	275 Alamanni invade Gaul		
276 Tacitus is murdered and replaced by Florianus, who is recognized by the senate (June/July). Simultaneously, the eastern legions declare Probus emperor. Shortly afterwards, Florianus is assassinated by his troops in Tarsus (August)		276 Probus campaigns against the Goths in Anatolia, then winters in Sirmium. Death of Vahran I, succeeded by Vahran II	
	277–8 Probus recovers Gaul		
	278 Battles against Vandals and Burgundians in Raetia		

- 282 Murder of Probus near Sirmium (September–October). The soldiers acclaim Carus emperor
- 283 Death of Carus near Ctesiphon (July/August). He is succeeded by Carinus in the west and Numerian in the east (Caesars 282)
- 284 Assassination of Numerian in Thrace at the instigation of his praetorian prefect, Aper (early November). He is succeeded by Diocles (20 November), who executes Aper and takes the name of Diocletian
- 285 Battle of the Margus between Diocletian and Carinus (April or May). Carinus is defeated, and subsequently killed by his own troops
- 280 Usurpation of Bonosus and Proculus
- 281 Probus celebrates a triumph in Rome, and winters there
- 282 Carus campaigns against the Sarmatians and the Quadi
- 283 Carinus campaigns against the Germans in Gaul
- 279 Suppression of Isaurian rebellion in Asia Minor. Siege of Cremna. Campaign against the Blemmyes in Egypt
- 280 Frankish piracy in the Mediterranean, including a raid on Syracuse
- 281 Usurpation of Saturninus. He is murdered by his own soldiers at Apamea
- 283 Carus and Numerian take the offensive against Vahran II in Mesopotamia. Capture of Ctesiphon and Seleucis on the Tigris. Numerian winters in Syria
- 283 The *Cynegetica* of Nemesianus

(cont.)

Emperors	The West	The East	Culture, Religion, Society
286 Maximian (Caesar 285) declared Augustus (1 March or 1 April)	286 Carausius declares himself Augustus in Britain (autumn)	286 Diocletian winters at Nicomedia, then summers in Palestine 287 Diocletian makes an agreement with Vahran II in Syria, and restores Tiridates III as ruler of Armenia	
	288 or 289 Conference between Diocletian and Maximian, possibly on the frontier of Raetia 289 Diocletian campaigns against the Sarmatians. Maximian defeated by Carausius		
	Dec. 290 or Jan. 291 Conference in Milan between Diocletian and Maximian	290 Diocletian campaigns against the Saraceni	
293 Constantius Chlorus and Galerius appointed Caesars in the west and east respectively (1 March). The first tetrarchy	293 Constantius captures Boulogne from Carausius. Carausius is killed by his minister Allectus, who continues to hold Britain	293 Death of Vahran II. Succeeded first by Vahran III, and then Narses I 293 or 294 Galerius suppresses a revolt in Upper Egypt	293 Introduction of diocesan organization c. 294 Coinage reform (or before 293) 295 Edict on Marriages (1 May)
	296 Constantius recovers Britain from Allectus. Diocletian defeats the Quadi on the Danube, and campaigns against the Carpi (summer/autumn)	296 Narses invades Armenia	
	297 Maximian combats a rebellion in Africa	297 Narses defeats Galerius near Carrhae (spring). Revolt in Egypt under L. Domitius Domitianus and Achilleus	c. 297 Purge of Christians in the army

- 305 Abdication of Diocletian and Maximian (1 May). Constantius and Galerius succeed them, and appoint Severus and Maximian Daia Caesars. The second tetrarchy
- 306 Death of Constantius at York (25 July). Constantine proclaimed emperor of the west by Constantius' soldiers
- 307 Constantine marries Fausta. He is recognized as Augustus by Maximian. Death of Severus
- 308 Conference at Carnuntum (11 November). Maximian is forced to retire a second time, and Licinius is invested as Augustus
- 303 Diocletian and Maximian celebrate their *vicennalia* at Rome (20 November). Galerius campaigns against the Carpi on the Danube
- 306 Maxentius acclaimed as princeps by the praetorians, and enlists the support of his father, Maximian
- 307 Maxentius and Maximian ally with Constantine. Galerius invades Italy, but subsequently withdraws to Pannonia (autumn). Severus marches on Rome. He is forced to retreat by Maxentius and Maximian, and abdicates in Ravenna (spring)
- 308 Domitius Alexander rebels against Maxentius in Africa, but is suppressed the following year
- 298 Galerius captures Ctesiphon. Diocletian suppresses the revolt in Egypt. He besieges and captures Alexandria
- 299 Peace treaty with Persia
- 302 Death of Narses, succeeded by Hormizd II
- 301 Currency reform (before September). Diocletian's Prices Edict (December)
- 302 Rescript against the Manichaeans
- 303 Great Persecution of the Christians begins (23 February)
- 304 Death of Pope Marcellinus
- 307 First issue of the *solidus*
- 309 Death of Hormizd II
- 309 Maximian's edict concerning the rebuilding of temples in Palestine

(cont.)

Emperors	The West	The East	Culture, Religion, Society
310 Death of Maximian after a revolt in Gaul. Maximin declared Augustus by his troops			310 Pamphilus executed c. 310 Lactantius becomes tutor to Crispus
311 Death of Galerius			311 Galerius' Edict of Tolerance (30 April). Persecution resumed by Maximin, and Peter of Alexandria martyred (November). Miltiades bishop of Rome
311 or 312 Death of Diocletian			312 Maximin's rescript expelling Christians from the cities
	312 Constantine is victorious over Maxentius at the battle of the Milvian Bridge (28 October)		
313 Marriage of Licinius to Constantia, Constantine's sister (February). Maximin commits suicide at Tarsus (c. July)		313 Licinius defeats Maximin near Adrianople (30 April)	313 Edict of freedom of religious belief issued jointly by Licinius and Constantine ('Edict of Milan'). Council in Rome condemns Donatists
	314 Constantine campaigns in Germany (autumn)		314 Council of Arles finds against Donatists. Verona List compiled. Introduction of the <i>chrysargyron</i>
	315 Constantine celebrates his <i>decennalia</i> at Rome		315 Arch of Constantine
	316 Battle of Cibalae between Constantine and Licinius (8 October), followed by reconciliation		
317 Crispus, younger Constantine and younger Licinius declared Caesars (1 March)			

324 Constantine elevates Helena and Fausta to the rank of Augusta. Constantius declared Caesar	324 Constantine defeats Licinius at the battle of Chrysopolis (18 September). Licinius is banished to Salonica. Foundation of the city of Constantinople (8 November)	321 Constantine abrogates responsibility for the Donatist controversy
326 Deaths of Crispus, Fausta and the younger Licinius c. 327 Death of Helena	326 Constantine's <i>vicennalia</i> celebrated in Rome	325 Council of Nicaea
333 Constans declared Caesar (25 December)	332 Constantine campaigns against the Goths	326 Holy pilgrimage of Helena
335 Dalmatius declared Caesar	334 Constantine campaigns against the Sarmatians	335 Dedication of the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Council of Tyre. First exile of Athanasius
337 Death of Constantine (22 May)	330 Dedication of the city of Constantinople (11 May)	336 Council of Constantinople. Exile of Marcellus of Ancyra
336 Constantine celebrates his <i>tricennalia</i> in Constantinople (25 July)		

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ABBREVIATIONS

PAPYROLOGICAL ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations of papyrological publications which are not included in the following list may be found in J. F. Oates *et al.*, *Checklist of Editions of Greek Papyri and Ostraka*, 4th edn. Atlanta, 1992, or the web edition: John F. Oates, Roger S. Bagnall, Sarah J. Clackson, Alexandra A. O'Brien, Joshua D. Sosin, Terry G. Wilfong, and Klaas A. Worp, *Checklist of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*, <<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html>>, Month, 200#.

<i>AARC</i>	<i>Atti dell'Accademia Romanistica Costantiniana</i>
<i>AAntHung</i>	<i>Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i>
<i>AArchHung</i>	<i>Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i>
<i>ABSA</i>	<i>Annual of the British School at Athens</i>
<i>AC</i>	<i>L'Antiquité Classique</i>
<i>ADAJ</i>	<i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan</i>
<i>AE</i>	<i>L'Année épigraphique</i>
<i>AJPh</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>Annales (ESC)</i>	<i>Annales (Économies, sociétés, civilisation)</i>
<i>Annales (HSS)</i>	<i>Annales (Histoire, Sciences sociales)</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
<i>AntAfr</i>	<i>Antiquités Africaines</i>
<i>ARS</i>	A. C. Johnson, P. R. Coleman-Norton and F. C. Bourne, <i>Ancient Roman Statutes</i> . Austin, TX, 1961
<i>ASR</i>	<i>Die antiken Sarkophagreliefs</i> , ed. C. Robert, Berlin, 1890–
<i>AT</i>	<i>L'Antiquité Tardive</i>
<i>Aur. Vict. Caes.</i>	Aurelius Victor, <i>De Caesaribus</i>
<i>BAH</i>	Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique
<i>BAR</i>	British Archaeological Reports
<i>BAR Int. Ser.</i>	British Archaeological Reports, International Series
<i>BAR Suppl. Ser.</i>	British Archaeological Reports, Supplementary Series
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BASP</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</i>
<i>BCH</i>	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
<i>BEFAR</i>	Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome

<i>BEO</i>	<i>Bulletin des Études Orientales</i>
<i>BGU</i>	<i>Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen/Staatlichen Museum zu Berlin, Griechische Urkunden.</i> Berlin, 1895–
<i>BICS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</i>
<i>BIDR</i>	<i>Bullettino dell'Istituto di Diritto Romano</i>
<i>BJ</i>	<i>Bonner Jahrbücher</i>
<i>BMC</i>	<i>Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum.</i> v (Pertinax to Elagabalus). H. Mattingly, London, 1950; vi (Severus Alexander to Balbinus and Pupienus). R. A. G. Carson, London, 1962
<i>BRGK</i>	<i>Bericht der römisch-germanischen Kommission</i>
<i>BSAC</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte</i>
<i>BSFN</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société française de numismatique</i>
<i>BSNAF</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>Bull. Ép.</i>	<i>Bulletin épigraphique in Revue des Études Grecques</i>
<i>CAH</i>	<i>Cambridge Ancient History:</i> vol. x ² (1996), xi ² (2000), xii ¹ (1939), xiii (1998); xiv (2000)
<i>Cahiers Glotz</i>	<i>Cahiers du Centre G. Glotz</i>
<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i>
<i>CE</i>	<i>Chronique d'Égypte</i>
<i>CEFR</i>	<i>Collection de l'École française de Rome</i>
<i>Chron. Min. I</i>	T. Mommsen, <i>Chronica Minora I</i> (Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctores Antiquissimi 9). Berlin, 1892
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>CIMRM</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae</i> , ed. M. J. Vermaseren, The Hague, 1956–60
<i>CIS</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i>
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Codex Iustinianus</i>
<i>CLRE</i>	R. S. Bagnall, A. Cameron, S. R. Schwartz and K. A. Worp, <i>Consuls of the Later Roman Empire</i> (Philological Monographs of the American Philological Association 36). Atlanta, 1987
<i>Coll.</i>	<i>Mosaicarum et Romanarum Legum Collatio</i> (in <i>FIRA</i> II.544–89)
<i>Cons.</i>	<i>Consultatio Veteris cuiusdam Iurisconsulti</i> (in <i>FIRA</i> II.594–613)
<i>CPh</i>	<i>Classical Philology</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CR</i>	<i>Classical Review</i>
<i>CRAI</i>	<i>Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres</i>
<i>CSCO</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i>
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
<i>CTh</i>	<i>Codex Theodosianus</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>Digest</i>
<i>DHA</i>	<i>Dialogues d'Histoire Ancienne</i>
<i>Diz. Ep.</i>	E. de Ruggiero et al., <i>Dizionario epigrafico di antichità romane.</i> Rome, 1886–
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
<i>EA</i>	<i>Epigraphica Anatolica</i>

<i>EPRO</i>	<i>Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain</i> , ed. M. J. Vermaseren, Leiden, 1961–
<i>ES</i>	<i>Epigraphische Studien</i>
<i>ESAR</i>	<i>An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome</i> , ed. T. Frank: I, <i>Rome and Italy of the Republic</i> ; II, <i>Roman Egypt to the Reign of Diocletian</i> ; III, <i>Roman Britain, Roman Spain, Roman Sicily, La Gaule Romaine</i> ; IV, <i>Roman Africa, Roman Syria, Roman Greece, Roman Asia</i> ; V, <i>Rome and Italy of the Empire</i> . Baltimore, 1933–40
<i>Eus. Hist. Eccl.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Eus. Vit. Const.</i>	Eusebius, <i>De Vita Constantini</i>
<i>Eutr.</i>	Eutropius
<i>Expositio</i>	<i>Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium</i> , ed. J. Rougé, SC 124. Paris, 1967
<i>FD III</i>	<i>Fouilles de Delphes</i> , III, <i>Épigraphie</i> . Paris, 1909–85
<i>FGrH</i>	<i>Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> , ed. F. Jacoby
<i>FHG</i>	<i>Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum</i> , ed. K. Müller. Paris, 1878–85
<i>FIRA</i>	S. Riccobono <i>et al.</i> , <i>Fontes Iuris Romani Anteiusianiani</i> , 2nd edn, 3 vols. [I, <i>Leges</i> ; II, <i>Auctores</i> ; III, <i>Negotia</i>]. Florence, 1940–3
<i>FV</i>	<i>Fragmenta Vaticana</i> (in <i>FIRA</i> II.464–540)
<i>GCN</i>	M. E. Smallwood, <i>Documents Illustrating the Principates of Gaius, Claudius and Nero</i> . Cambridge, 1967
<i>GCS</i>	<i>Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte</i>
<i>GLP</i>	D. L. Page, <i>Greek Literary Papyri</i> , vol. I (= <i>Select Papyri</i> III) (Loeb Classical Library). Cambridge, MA and London, 1942
<i>G&R</i>	<i>Greece and Rome</i>
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>H.</i>	The Hatran Inscriptions: see Part v, ch. 16 n. 39
<i>HAC¹</i>	<i>Historia Augusta Colloquia</i> , original series. Bonn, 1964–91
<i>HAC²</i>	<i>Historia Augusta Colloquia</i> , new series. Macerata, 1991, thereafter Bari, 1994–
<i>HAW</i>	<i>Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft</i>
<i>Herod.</i>	Herodian
<i>HLL</i>	<i>Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike</i>
<i>HSCP</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
<i>HTThR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>IA</i>	<i>Iranica Antiqua</i>
<i>IAM</i>	M. Euzennat, J. Marion and J. Gascou, <i>Inscriptions antiques du Maroc</i> II. Paris, 1982
<i>I. Aryk.</i>	S. Şahin, <i>Die Inschriften von Arykanda</i> (IGSK 48). Bonn, 1994
<i>ICret</i>	M. Guarducci, <i>Inscriptiones Creticae</i> , 4 vols. Rome, 1935–50
<i>I. Cyme</i>	<i>Die Inschriften von Kyme</i> , ed. H. Engelmann (IGSK 5). Bonn, 1976
<i>I. Eph.</i>	<i>Die Inschriften von Ephesos</i> (IGSK II–17). 8 vols. in 10. Bonn, 1979–84
<i>IG</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i>

- IGBulg* G. Mihailov, *Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria Repertae*, 5 vols. in 6. Sofia, 1958–97
- IGF* J.-CL. Decourt. *Inscriptions grecques de la France (IGF)*. Lyons, 2004
- IGLS* *Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de la Syrie*
- IGRR* R. Cagnat et al., *Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes*, 3 vols. (1, 3, 4). Paris, 1906–27
- IGSK* Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien
- IL Afr* R. Cagnat, A. Merlin and L. Chatelain, *Inscriptions Latines d'Afrique (Tripolitane, Tunisie et Maroc)*. Paris, 1923
- ILM* L. Chatelain, *Inscriptions Latines du Maroc*. Paris, 1942
- ILS* *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*
- IME* *Inscriptions métriques de l'Égypte gréco-romaine: Recherches sur la poésie épigrammatique des grecs en Égypte*, ed. E. Bernand. Paris, 1969
- IMS* F. Papazoglou et al., *Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure*. Belgrade: I (Singidunum and NW area, 1976); II (Viminacium and Margum, 1986); III.2 (Timacum Minus and Timok valley, 1995); IV (Naissus–Remesiana–Horreum Margi, 1979); VI (Scupi and Kumanovo region, 1982)
- InscrIt* *Inscriptiones Italiae*. Rome, 1931–
- Inv. Pal.* Cantineau, J. et al., *Inventaire des Inscriptions de Palmyre*. 12 fascicles: I–IX (J. Cantineau), Beirut; X (J. Starcky), Damascus; XI (J. Teixidor), Beirut; XII (A. Bounni and J. Teixidor), Damascus. (1930–75)
- IRT* J. M. Reynolds and J. B. Ward-Perkins, *The Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania*. Rome, 1952
- I. Smyrn.* G. Petzl, *Die Inschriften von Smyrna* (IGSK 23, 24), 2 vols. in 3. Bonn, 1982–90
- It. Ant.* *Itineraria Antonini Augusti* (O. Cuntz, ed., *Itineraria Romana* 1. Stuttgart, 1929 (repr. 1990))
- JBAA* *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*
- JAC* *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*
- JEA* *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
- JEH* *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*
- JHS* *Journal of Hellenic Studies*
- JJP* *Journal of Juristic Papyrology*
- JNES* *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
- JRA* *Journal of Roman Archaeology*
- JRGZM* *Jahrbuch des römisch-germanischen Zentralmuseums, Mainz*
- JRS* *Journal of Roman Studies*
- JS* *Journal des Savants*
- JSAS* *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*
- JThS* *Journal of Theological Studies*
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Lact. <i>DMP</i>	Lactantius, <i>De Mortibus Persecutorum</i>
<i>LoisRom</i>	<i>Les Lois des Romains: 7^e édition par un groupe de romanistes des 'Textes de droit romain' tome II de Paul Frédéric Girard et Félix Senn</i> , ed. V. Giuffrè (Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di Giurisprudenza della Università di Camerino 12). Naples, 1977
<i>LSCG</i>	F. Sokolowski, <i>Lois sacrées des cités grecques</i> (École française d'Athènes, Travaux et mémoires 18). Paris, 1969
<i>MAAR</i>	<i>Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome</i>
<i>MAL</i>	<i>Atti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Memorie. Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche</i>
<i>MAMA</i>	<i>Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua</i> . 10 vols. Manchester, then London, 1928–93
<i>MBAH</i>	<i>Münstersche Beiträge zur antiken Handelsgeschichte</i>
<i>MEFRA</i>	<i>Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Antiquité</i>
<i>MPER</i> n.s.	Mitteilungen aus der Papyrussammlung der österreichischen Nationalbibliothek in Wien. New Series, 1932–
Münch.Beitr.	Münchener Beiträge zur Papyrusforschung und antiken Rechtsgeschichte
<i>MUSJ</i>	<i>Mélanges de l'Université St Joseph</i>
<i>NC</i>	<i>Numismatic Chronicle</i>
<i>NDIEC</i>	G. H. R. Horsley, R. A. Kearsley, and S. R. Llewelyn, <i>New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity</i> : I (1981); II (1982); III (1983); IV (1987); V (1989); VI (1992); VII (1994), North Ryde, NSW; VIII (1998), Grand Rapids, MI
<i>NZ</i>	<i>Numismatische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>OCD</i> ³	<i>Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> , eds. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth, 3rd edn. Oxford, 1996
<i>OGIS</i>	W. Dittenberger, <i>Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae</i> , 2 vols. Leipzig, 1903–5
<i>OLP</i>	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica</i>
<i>OR</i>	<i>Opuscula Romana</i>
<i>Origo</i>	<i>Origo Constantini</i> , ed. I. König. Trier, 1987
<i>P&P</i>	<i>Past and Present</i>
<i>PACT</i>	<i>Physical, Chemical and Mathematical Techniques applied to Archaeology</i>
<i>PAES</i>	E. Littmann <i>et al.</i> , <i>Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expedition to Syria</i> . III: Greek and Latin Inscriptions. A, Southern Syria (Leiden, 1904–21); B, Northern Syria (Leiden, 1908–22); IV: Semitic Inscriptions (Leiden, 1914–49)
<i>Pan. Lat.</i>	<i>Panegyrici Latini</i> (cited in the numeration of Mynors' Oxford Classical Text (1964) and Nixon and Rodgers, <i>Panegyrici</i>)
<i>PBSR</i>	<i>Papers of the British School at Rome</i>
<i>P. Cairo Isid.</i>	A. E. R. Boak and H. C. Youtie, <i>The Archive of Aurelius Isidorus in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo and the University of Michigan</i> . Ann Arbor, 1960
<i>P. Col.</i> 123	see Westermann and Schiller, <i>Apokrimata</i>

PCPS	<i>Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society</i>
PE	Diocletian's <i>Prices Edict</i> (see Giacchero, <i>Edictum Diocletiani</i>)
PECS	R. Stillwell <i>et al.</i> , <i>The Princeton Encyclopedia of Classical Sites</i> . Princeton, 1976
<i>P. Euphr.</i>	see Feissel and Gascou, 'Documents'; plus <i>JS</i> (1995) 61–118; <i>JS</i> (1997) 3–57; <i>JS</i> (2000) 157–208; <i>CRAI</i> (1990) 144–66; <i>Semitica</i> 41–2 (1991–2): 195–208
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
<i>P. Giss.</i>	O. Eger <i>et al.</i> , <i>Griechische Papyri im Museum des oberhessischen Geschichtsvereins zu Giessen</i> . Leipzig–Berlin, 1910–12
<i>P. Giss. Lit.</i>	<i>Die Giessener literarischen Papyri und die Caracalla-Erlasse</i> , ed. P. A. Kuhlmann (Berichte und Arbeiten aus der Universitätsbibliothek und dem Universitätsarchiv Giessen 46). Giessen, 1994
PGM	K. Preisendanz and A. Henrichs, <i>Papyri Graecae Magicae: die griechischen Zauberpapyri</i> , 2nd edn. Stuttgart, 1973–74
PIR	<i>Prosopographia Imperii Romani</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
PLRE	A. H. M. Jones, R. Morris and R. Martindale, <i>The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i> , 3 vols. Cambridge, 1971–92
PO	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i>
<i>P. Oxy.</i>	B. P. Grenfell <i>et al.</i> , <i>The Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i> . London, 1898–
<i>P. Panop. Beatty</i>	T. C. Skeat, <i>Papyri from Panopolis in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin</i> . Dublin, 1964
RAC	<i>Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana</i>
RLAC	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i>
RAL	<i>Atti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Rendiconti. Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche</i>
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
RBPh	<i>Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire</i>
RE	Pauly-Wissowa, <i>Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>
REA	<i>Revue des Études Anciennes</i>
REArm	<i>Revue des Études Arméniennes</i>
REAug	<i>Revue des Études Augustiniennes</i>
REByz	<i>Revue des Études Byzantines</i>
RES	<i>Répertoire d'Épigraphie Sémitique publié par la Commission du Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i> , vol. v, ed. G. Ryckmans. Paris, 1929
RFIC	<i>Rivista di Filologia e di Istruzione Classica</i>
RGDS	<i>Res Gestae Divi Saporis</i> (see also <i>ŠKZ</i>)
RHDFE	<i>Revue Historique de Droit Français et Étranger</i>
RIB	<i>The Roman Inscriptions of Britain</i> , vol. 1, 1965, rev. edn 1995
RIC	<i>Roman Imperial Coinage</i> . v.1 (Valerian I to Florian), P. H. Webb, London, 1927; v.2 (Probus to Amandus), P. H. Webb, London, 1933; vi (Diocletian's reform to Maximinus), C. H. Sutherland

	and R. A. G. Carson, London, 1967; vii (Constantine and Licinius), P. Bruun, London, 1966
<i>RICH</i>	A. S. Robertson, <i>Roman Imperial Coins in the Hunter Coin Cabinet</i> , University of Glasgow. iii (Pertinax to Aemilian) Oxford, 1977; iv (Valerian to Allectus) Oxford, 1978
<i>RIDA</i>	<i>Revue Internationale des Droits de l'Antiquité</i>
<i>RN</i>	<i>Revue Numismatique</i>
<i>RPC I</i>	A. Burnett, M. Amandry and P. P. Ripollès, <i>Roman Provincial Coinage</i> , Vol. 1: <i>From the Death of Caesar to the Death of Vitellius</i> (44 B.C.–A.D. 69). London and Paris, 1992
<i>RPh</i>	<i>Revue de Philologie, de Littérature et d'Histoire Anciennes</i>
<i>RS I</i>	<i>Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophag</i> e, 1: <i>Rom und Ostia</i> , eds. F. Deichmann, G. Bovini and H. Brandenburg. Wiesbaden, 1967
<i>RS II</i>	<i>Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophag</i> e, II: <i>Italien mit einem Nachtrag Rom und Ostia, Dalmatien, Museen der Welt</i> , eds. T. Ulbert and J. Dresken-Weiland. Mainz, 1998
<i>RSA</i>	<i>Rivista Storica dell'Antichità</i>
<i>SB</i>	<i>Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Aegypten</i>
<i>SBAW</i>	Sitzungsberichte der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Philosophisch-historische Klasse)
<i>SC</i>	Sources chrétiennes
<i>SCO</i>	<i>Studi classici e orientali</i>
<i>SDHI</i>	<i>Studia et Documenta Historiae et Iuris</i>
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
<i>SHA</i>	<i>Scriptores Historiae Augustae</i>
<i>SIG³</i>	W. Dittenberger, <i>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> , 3rd edn, 4 vols. Leipzig, 1915–24
<i>ŠKZ</i>	<i>Šabuhri I. an der Ka'ba-i Zardušt = Res Gestae Divi Saporis</i> (see Huyse, <i>ŠKZ</i> ; Sprengling, <i>Iran</i>)
<i>SÖAW</i>	Sitzungsberichte der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Philosophisch-historische Klasse)
<i>Soc.</i>	Socrates Scholasticus
<i>Soz.</i>	Sozomen
<i>StAmst</i>	<i>Studia Amstelodamensia ad epigraphicam, ius antiquum et papyrologicam pertinentia</i>
<i>TAM</i>	<i>Tituli Asiae Minoris</i> . Vienna, 1901–
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>TAVO</i>	<i>Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients</i>
<i>TIR</i>	<i>Tabula Imperii Romani</i> ; for individual maps, see details in Bibliography Part III
<i>Tit. Ulp.</i>	<i>Tituli ex Corpore Ulpiani</i> = Ulpian's <i>Regulae</i> (<i>FIRA</i> II.262–301)
<i>TR</i>	<i>Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis</i> (<i>Revue d'Histoire du Droit</i>)
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Trierer Zeitschrift</i>
<i>YCS</i>	<i>Yale Classical Studies</i>

ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
Zon.	Zonaras
Zos.	Zosimus
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>
ZRG	<i>Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte: Romanistische Abteilung</i>

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